The Neo-Babylonian Empire

The Complete Study · 626 — 562 — 539 BC

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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Preface and Outline

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The collaboration

This is a case study in the Patterns of Power series, applying the series' framework to the Neo-Babylonian Empire, from the coronation of Nabopolassar on 23 November 626 BC to the entry of Cyrus into Babylon on 29 October 539. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column in which each subject prices defection, the seam that manages the belief on which the whole depends, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running through all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like solutions because a position poses a problem with only a few good answers.

Babylon was chosen as the controlled comparison to this collection's preceding study. Two empires, one country, ninety years apart, running the same roads, the same provinces, the same relay system, the same deportation apparatus and the same administrative vocabulary — and lifespans of roughly three centuries and eighty-seven years. That ratio is raised in the opening and answered in the last module, and much of what the study finds came out of watching which of Assyria's instruments Babylon took up and which it left on the ground.

The case was also set to test one proposition. The Assyria study had closed by adding a third solution to the founder's dilemma: that a durable warrant must be anchored in something the wearer appears subject to rather than to control, that the corpus knew two ways of securing one — kill the man and keep the institution, or capture the institution and staff it — and that Assyria had used a third, making the anchor a *place*, a hill with a temple on it that has no spokesman who can be bought. The price of that solution is that the most external anchor available is also the most destructible; when Assur was destroyed in 614 the coronation could not be performed. Babylon drew the other solution. Its anchor was Marduk, held by the Esagila and its priesthood, renewed annually at a rite the king could not perform alone. **The prediction to test was that an anchor held by an institution with a spokesman**

does not get destroyed; it gets turned. It was confirmed, and the mechanism turned out to be neither capture nor bribery but something cheaper, which the last module names.

A second hypothesis was put to the case with instructions to test the unglamorous explanation first: that Babylon deported the same kinds of people as Assyria and settled them together, and that what came out was a scripture — but that the concentration may be an artefact of hydrology rather than of humanity, since irrigated agriculture needs labour assembled in blocks and rain-fed agriculture does not. The unglamorous explanation held.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, its spine, and the case, and held the collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying every load-bearing quotation, date and figure by web search against a source reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. The framework's concepts are the series'; the Babylonian application, and the refinements it yielded, are the work of the collaboration.

The standing problem

Every study in this series has a source problem. This one's is the exact inverse of its predecessor's, and recognising that early organised the whole book.

Assyria left three centuries of royal annals in which the king never loses, and almost no economy. Babylon left almost no annals and the best-documented economy in the ancient world before Rome. Nebuchadnezzar II ruled forty-three years, destroyed the Egyptian army at Carchemish, took Jerusalem twice, blockaded Tyre for thirteen years and campaigned into Arabia — and in an enormous inscriptional corpus he never names an enemy, never names a battle, and never describes a campaign. C. J. Gadd put it in 1923 in a sentence this study has quoted more than once: the inscriptions, copious as they are, record nothing but building operations, and abstain, with an almost sedulous perversity, from any but the vaguest reference to contemporary affairs.

Two consequences follow, and both are load-bearing.

The first is opportunity. Tens of thousands of tablets survive from the Eanna at Uruk, the Ebabbar at Sippar and the Egibi family of Babylon, carrying prices, wages, rents, interest, land leases and prebend transfers running straight across the conquest of 539. For the first time in the ancient part of this collection the cost column can be *calculated* rather than inferred, and Modules 5 and 6 take that opportunity.

The second is that the silence is itself a finding, and the study reads it in a specific way. A royal inscription is a performance report submitted to a principal, and its subject matter tells you what its author was being assessed on. An Assyrian king reports conquests because he was scored on the god's expanding domain; a Babylonian king reports bricks because he was scored on the god's provisioning, a metric he published in the first line of his own titulary. The silence about Carchemish is not concealment. It is indifference, and mistaking the one for the other manufactures a conspiracy where there is only a job description.

There is a third problem, less obvious and more damaging, which Module 7 states on its own face and which qualifies every finding in the book. The Babylonian state increasingly ran its administration in Aramaic, written in ink on papyrus and leather. The temples went on writing Akkadian in cuneiform on clay. One medium survives burial for two and a half thousand years and the other survives it not at all. **Our entire picture of this order is therefore temple-shaped — not because the temples dominated it, but because the temples were conservative about stationery.** The study's central structural proposition, that one body equipped the army, conferred the warrant, collected the revenue and kept the records, is built substantially from that body's own surviving files, and is discounted accordingly where it is stated rather than defended in a footnote.

And there is a trap. Almost everything ever said against the last king of Babylon was written by people who benefited from his fall. The Verse Account is hostile polemic and the Cyrus Cylinder is a conqueror's manifesto composed in the defeated city's own idiom. Both are handled the way the Assyria study handled Sargon's charter for Assur: the charge tells you what the intended audience would find persuasive, not what happened. Nabonidus's own inscriptions survive and say something different — including a basalt stele recording donations to the three great temples on the order of three tonnes of silver, which is not the record of a man who had stopped paying.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly, at the length the argument needs, because in an order held together by legal fictions the precise wording is the evidence and not its decoration. The corpus quoted here is Stephen Langdon's *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire* (1905), which carries the royal inscriptions in English; François Thureau-Dangin's *Rituels accadiens* (1921), which carries the New Year ritual in French and is translated here with that flagged at the point of use; C. J. Gadd's *The Fall of Nineveh* (1923) for the chronicle of Assyria's

collapse; D. D. Luckenbill's *Ancient Records* (1926–27) for Sennacherib; R. F. Harper's *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature* (1901) for Sargon; Dougherty (1929) and Sayce (1891) for the tithe receipts; Josephus in Whiston's translation; and the Authorised Version throughout for the account of the party that lost.

A specific and unusual constraint should be stated here rather than discovered in a source note. The Babylonian chronicles — the tablet covering Nebuchadnezzar's early years, and the Nabonidus Chronicle — are the spine of the political narrative, and *every* English translation of them is in copyright: Wiseman's of 1956, Grayson's of 1975, Glassner's of 2004, and the versions derived from them. Sidney Smith's public-domain edition of 1924 was not available in this work. The chronicles are therefore **paraphrased throughout and never quoted at length**, with the odd short phrase marked as a modern rendering. Anyone building on the chronicle material here should go to the editions.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is ever invented or reconstructed from memory. What cannot be verified against a source reproducing the primary text is dropped or flagged, never guessed. Contested figures are given as ranges — and this study has a great many, because the two biblical accounts of the Judaean deportations differ by a factor of four, the leading reconstructions of Judah's settlement decline differ by a factor of nearly two, and the origins of the founder of the dynasty remain genuinely unresolved.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity, and the study refuses both flattery and demonisation. It writes from the top of the order, where the men who ran it actually stood. Legibility is not pardon: to explain an order's logic, even to credit its competence, is never to excuse it. And in this case a second discipline is needed alongside the first, because the most consequential thing to come out of the period was made by people the empire had broken — legibility is not pardon, and it is also not credit.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework, stated plainly in its closing section, rather than merely applying the framework to the case. The findings compound across the modules rather than being announced fresh each time.

Weakest evidence on the face of the module. Each part closes with a note separating exact primary quotation from paraphrased scholarship and naming its own weak links, including where they would embarrass the argument.

Four particular cautions were held throughout. The Bible was not allowed to drive the periodisation — the pressure is worse here than for Assyria, because the exile is among the most consequential events in the history of the West and Judah was a small vassal on the western edge; the Hebrew sources are used for what nothing else gives, a

contemporary account from inside the empire by people it had moved, and never as the spine. The book of Daniel is not used: it is centuries later, confuses Nabonidus with Nebuchadnezzar, and invents a Median conquest that did not happen. Nabonidus is neither romanticised nor accepted in caricature, both being somebody's propaganda, and the Arabian decade is given a fiscal and strategic reading before a religious one. And the walls are not allowed to do the work: the Ishtar Gate, the processional way and the hanging gardens — which may not have been in Babylon at all — are famous and largely beside the analytic point.

What the Neo-Babylonian Empire added to the framework

The case confirmed a great deal the framework had banked, and added several findings of its own. Chief among them:

That an inherited floor of reach operates at the radius it was built for and rarely extends it, because reach is not roads but a bundle of capabilities assembled against the obstacles the *builder* happened to face — so that an inheritor gets the pickaxes and the ramps and not the two centuries of learning that would let him grow a new capability, and the first unfamiliar obstacle is where he stops permanently.

That a fourth family of settlement fiction exists beside vacancy, recognition and divisibility, and tells no lie at all: *endowment*, in which a ruler grants nothing to the elite but pours wealth into the institution the elite already draws from, enriching every member without altering a single title. It is the move available to a ruler who came from inside the order he has taken over. And its defect is that **enrichment is not alignment** — a grant creates a dependency, an endowment creates only a preference for endowers.

That an order can run two settlements at once on opposite principles, and that the tie may form at the bottom rather than the top: the Babylonian citizen with a prebend held nothing of the king, while the deported Judaean on a crown plot held everything of him.

That a robe cut as a job description names its own succession criterion. A comparative-martial claim is a statement about one man's life and cannot be worn by another; a custodial-functional claim — *provider of Esagila and Ezida*, published in the first line of the titulary — is a specification, and a specification can be met by a competitor and certified by whoever holds the standard.

That formation is confirmed from the positive direction, and that neither empire in this pair had a formation policy at all: both had a labour policy, and identity was the residue. And that formations divide by what carries them — an *ambient* formation, carried by a city and a calendar and a procession, is cheap and cannot travel; an *explicit* one, carried by a text and a fixed day and a household, is expensive and can. The

conversion from the first to the second is forced by the destruction of the carriers and is possible only where the community survives the destruction.

That a liberty won by one class can raise the price of labour for another through the market rather than through law, since an exemption from conscript labour obliged a crown holding three centuries of looted silver to buy the labour it could not command.

That exit's ceiling is economic rather than moral — a temple stopped chasing runaways because recapture cost more than the man was worth — and that where a market prices flight, the warranty clause and the bounty are the ruler's own published estimate of his reach.

That the direction of flow between a ruler and the institution holding his warrant can reverse, and that the crossover is datable and is the beginning of the fracture; and that where the taxman and the anchor-holder are the same body, a fiscal squeeze *is* a legitimacy crisis, with a lag.

That the unit of analysis for succession violence is not the elite but the faction that can physically decide an accession — and that convertible elite capital does not calm a succession but evacuates it, removing the one party with the standing to impose order and nothing to gain from disorder.

That institutional scar tissue forms only where the injured party survives with the means to legislate, so that an order may sustain the same failure repeatedly and never build a response.

That where the interpretive class is also the fiscal instrument, the deception runs upward, and its instrument is manufactured antiquity — the one claim a ruler can neither audit nor outrank.

That a change of apex and a change of arrangement are different events which should be dated separately, and that a conquest leaving the settlement and the personnel in place is a change of management.

That the metabolic note is called by the disruption of coordination and not by the fall of a ruler — and that it can be called deliberately, on a third party, by an order that never pays its own.

And, largest of all, that an institutional anchor does not have to be captured. It only has to be re-awarded, and the transfer happens by **non-obstruction** — the cheapest political act in existence, which requires nothing of the certifying body, carries no risk, and leaves no document.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own title.

Landscape — I Made It Like a Meadow. The water that has to be led, the cities that were already ancient, the tribes who could always go into the reeds, and an imperial machine inherited whole from the enemy just destroyed. A god who arrived late and whose displacement of his predecessors was re-performed annually with their faces covered.

1 — The Floor of Force. Every Shoulder Was Peeled. An army reconstructed sideways from temple account books, because the empire refused to describe one; a radius fixed in a single afternoon and never extended; and a thirteen-year siege that paid nothing, reported by a deportee who watched the men come back.

2 — The Settlement. Seven and a Half Days. A security denominated in days of the year, registered in a wax ledger kept by a god; a dynasty that conquered nothing at home and therefore expropriated nobody; and the discovery that a class made enormously richer for eighty-seven years had never been tied to the men who enriched it.

3 — The Robe. Bricks and Mud Upon My Head. A founder who took off the garment of his royal office, carried a hod in front of his people, and buried a statue of himself as a labourer in the wall; the rite in which a king was stripped, struck and made to recite what he had not done; and the clause the arrangement carried from its first year.

4 — Formation. Increased There, and Not Diminished. A letter telling deportees to marry their children to each other, set beside an Assyrian official asking his king to pay the bride price; and the finding that a formation stripped of its institutional carriers must either die or become portable.

5 — The Cost Column. O Nabu, Stop His Feet. Six ledgers run separately with real arithmetic; the disappearance of self-sale as a measure of what an order delivers at the bottom; and a name given to a runaway by the man trying to keep him.

6 — Extraction. The Tithe Which the King Gave. A windfall spent, a circuit at capacity, and the year the richest temple in the south sold its gold and could not pay its priests — followed by the quiet conversion of its own revenue lines into royal taxes, and a king who spent a decade in a desert looking for a trade route.

7 — Information and Suppression. This Is Not a Lie, It Is the Truth. A charter seventeen centuries too old, forged by priests and shown to a king; the six-hundred-year observation programme that belonged to a temple; and the state archive that was written on the wrong material.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. Sat in the Middle Gate. A list of the men who mattered, taken down by a man they had just conquered, one of whom

became king; four kings in six years in the most legally secure elite society of the ancient world; and the class that was not there while it happened.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. The Head Above the Law Court. A stone replica of an executed man's head bolted to a courthouse gate; liberties sold to a conquered city by its occupier to split the country; and a right that ended up carried by a poem, a liturgy and a forgery, none of which can compel anybody.

10 — Change and Collapse. No Date Was Missed. Nineteen days, one battle, and the strongest walls in the world standing behind nothing; the three cities whose gods did not come when the king asked; and a liturgy that ran on schedule while a foreign army stood at the door.

11 — The Grim Accounting. Four Thousand and Six Hundred. The sword column counted for once by the victims; a metabolic note that was never called at home and was called deliberately on a small kingdom in the hills; and an empire remembered universally, in the words of the people it deported.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. The Regular Watching. The organising question answered and corrected, the controlled comparison settled, the three-way choice a ruler faces with a rich institution he cannot dispossess, and the strongest case that nothing here failed at all — stated at full strength and answered without flinching.

A note on sources. This front matter is descriptive and makes no primary-source claims of its own; every factual assertion about the case is established, with its sources and its flags, in the module it summarises. The framework it describes is the series'; the disciplines it lists are the ones the modules hold themselves to and document in their own closing notes. The reader who wishes to test this study should begin with those notes, which are written to make that testing possible — including where it would embarrass the argument.

Three parts rest more heavily on inference than the rest and say so. Module 8's claim that the great families were absent from the succession crises is an argument from silence in archives that are overwhelmingly commercial and might not have recorded political alignment in any case. Module 11's metabolic reading of Judah depends on a body of archaeological interpretation contested by a factor of nearly two, with a live minority position rejecting the decline altogether. And Module 12's central mechanism — that the certification transferred by non-obstruction — is by its nature a claim about an act that leaves no evidence, argued from a pattern assembled across five modules rather than from any document. A reader who declines all three will still find the study's economic, ritual and comparative findings standing; he should decline them consciously, which is what the notes are for.

LANDSCAPE

I Made It Like a Meadow

Landscape · the water that had to be led, the cities that were already ancient, the tribes who could always go into the reeds, and an imperial machine inherited whole from the enemy who had just been destroyed

Like a meadow

In 689 BC an Assyrian king recorded what he had done to Babylon, and he recorded it at length, because the point of the record was that there should be nothing left to record afterwards. Sennacherib had besieged the city for something like nine to fifteen months — the sources differ — and when it fell he wrote that he had destroyed the houses from their foundations to their roofs and burnt them; that he had torn down the inner and outer walls, the temples, the gods and the temple towers of brick and earth, as many as there were, and thrown them into the Araḫtu canal; that he had cut channels through the middle of the city and let the water in; and that he had done this so that in days to come the site of that city and its temples and its gods should not be remembered. The last clause is the one that matters. *I completely blotted it out with floods of water and made it like a meadow.*

Eighty-seven years later a man of no announced ancestry was crowned king in that city on the twenty-third of November, 626, and within seventeen years the empire that had produced Sennacherib had ceased to exist, its capitals taken apart one after another, its last king holding a provincial town on the Upper Euphrates with an Egyptian army for company. The city that had been made like a meadow buried Assyria and then ruled everything Assyria had ruled, from the Persian Gulf to the Egyptian border, for eighty-seven years more. Nothing in this study is more useful to hold at the outset than the gap between those two facts, because it tells you at once what could and could not be destroyed in southern Mesopotamia, and the answer turns out to organise a great deal.

What Sennacherib could destroy was the fabric. Mud brick is cheap and it is everywhere, and a city of it can be levelled by a determined army in a season and rebuilt in a decade, which is roughly what happened: his own son Esarhaddon began putting Babylon back together within a few years of his father's murder in 681. What Sennacherib could not destroy was the arrangement that made Babylon worth destroying — a set of relations between water and land and temple and city that had

been running, with interruptions, for something on the order of seventeen centuries before Nabopolassar was crowned, and which had already outlasted an Amorite dynasty, four hundred years of Kassite rule, an Elamite sack, a long fragmentation, and by 689 something close to a century of Assyrian management. A conqueror arriving in this country did not meet a blank field on which to write. He met a very old machine, still turning, with its own operators, its own charters, its own calendar and its own account of who was entitled to work it — and the first thing he had to establish, before anything else, was whether the machine would run for him.

That is the subject of this landscape: what was standing in Babylonia on the eve of 626, how much of it was older than anyone alive, and how much of it had itself been put there by an earlier conquest that had been running long enough for nobody to think of it as one.

A country that has to be watered

Begin with the ground, because in this case the ground is not scenery. It sets the terms of the settlement, the shape of the labour, the geography of revolt and the fiscal calendar, and it does so in a way that separates this study from its immediate predecessor at almost every point.

Southern Mesopotamia does not receive enough rain to grow a crop. Below roughly the latitude of Baghdad the annual fall is too low and too unreliable for dry farming, so every field in the country that produced anything did so because somebody had led water to it. Northern Mesopotamia — the Assyrian heartland around the Tigris above the Little Zab — sits above the isohyet where rain-fed cereal agriculture works, and this single difference of a few hundred kilometres and a few hundred millimetres runs underneath everything the two empires did. Assyrian farmers could put seed in the ground and wait for the sky. Babylonian farmers could not, and had never been able to, and the whole of their civilisation is downstream of that fact.

What irrigation on this plain actually required is worth stating concretely, because it is easy to say "irrigation" and mean nothing by it. The Euphrates and the Tigris arrive on the alluvium carrying a very large silt load and running across ground so flat that the gradient is measured in centimetres per kilometre. Over time the rivers build their own beds up above the surrounding plain, contained by levees of their own deposit, which is convenient — water will run out of a perched channel onto the land by gravity — and periodically catastrophic, because a perched river that breaks its levee does not flood and recede; it changes course, and takes the settlement pattern with it. The canals do the same thing on a smaller scale. Silt settles wherever the water slows, so a canal that is not cleaned fills, and a canal that fills either backs up or spills, and the spoil taken out of

it piles along its banks until the whole system is a network of raised ridges across a flat country. Archaeological survey in the region between Sippar and Tell ed-Dēr has found canal spoil banks standing as much as five metres above the present surface. None of this is a one-off construction cost. It is a permanent, annual, unavoidable maintenance obligation, and the obligation falls on whoever is holding the country at the time.

Three consequences follow, and they should be held right through this study.

The first is that a permanent coordinating authority is not optional here. It does not follow that the authority must be a king, or an empire, or anything in particular — temples and city assemblies ran canals for long stretches without a state above them — but it does follow that somebody, every year, must decide where the water goes, must compel the labour to dig it out, and must adjudicate between the man at the head of the channel and the man at the tail. The digging obligation is one of the oldest attested duties in Mesopotamian law and it recurs in the Neo-Babylonian documents as a matter of course. A society on this ground that cannot organise that work does not become poorer; it stops eating.

The second is that the labour has to be concentrated. A rain-fed village can be a scatter of households on their own plots at the density the soil supports, because nothing any household does requires anybody else's cooperation on the day. Canal agriculture is the opposite: the work is lumpy, seasonal and collective, and it makes sense only where enough hands can be assembled at one point on one stretch of channel. This is not a moral fact about Babylonians and it is not a plan anyone drew up; it is what the hydrology pays for. It is worth flagging now, because it will matter a great deal later when this study comes to ask why the Neo-Babylonian empire settled its deportees in blocks of one origin while Assyria had dispersed and mixed its own. The unglamorous possibility — that the difference is an artefact of water rather than of policy — has to be tested before anything more flattering is accepted, and this is where the testing starts.

The third is that the productivity, when the system works, is extraordinary, and the dependency, when it fails, is total. Irrigated barley on the Babylonian alluvium returned yields that astonished Greek visitors and that the modern estimates, however cautiously handled, still put well above rain-fed Mediterranean norms; and the date palm, which tolerates the brackish groundwater that kills cereals and which the Neo-Babylonian period planted aggressively on land that had been under barley, produced more calories per hectare still. Michael Jursa's work on the economy of what he calls the long sixth century — the stretch from the fall of Assyria to the Babylonian revolts against Xerxes in 484 — describes an agrarian expansion in exactly these terms: canals extended, date gardens laid out on former arable, and a real if modest growth in output, with the

investment beginning under the Neo-Babylonian kings and paying off across the conquest of 539. The other side of the same ledger is that a population fed by such a system is a population held above what the unimproved land would carry, and that a serious interruption to the system calls that difference in. Whether it was ever called in during this period is a question for the accounting at the end of the study, and it should be approached knowing that the long-run salinisation thesis — the argument, associated above all with Thorkild Jacobsen and Robert McCormick Adams, that centuries of irrigation without drainage progressively poisoned the southern soil — is genuinely contested, has been substantially revised since it was proposed, and cannot simply be reached for.

One further feature of the ground deserves naming here because it recurs. Where the two rivers approach the Gulf the country dissolves into marsh — a shifting waterscape of reed beds and shallow lagoons that no army in antiquity ever successfully occupied. It is agriculturally marginal and militarily impenetrable, and it sits directly beside the richest farmland in the world at that date. That combination — extreme wealth and an adjacent zone into which a man can disappear — is not a detail of the map. It is the reason certain people in this landscape could bargain and others could not.

Cities older than the idea of a king

The second thing standing on this ground was a set of cities so old that their own inhabitants had lost the beginning of them.

Babylon, Borsippa, Sippar, Kish, Kutha, Dilbat, Nippur, Uruk, Larsa, Ur: the list is not a list of provincial towns. Uruk had been a city before writing existed to record that it was one. Nippur had been the seat of Enlil, head of the Sumerian pantheon, when Babylon was a village nobody had heard of. Each of these places carried, in the seventh century, a great temple with an estate attached to it — arable land, date gardens, herds, herdsmen, weavers, brewers, bakers, smiths, and a body of dependants called *širku*, oblates dedicated to the god and marked as his — and each temple ran that estate through an administration that kept written accounts. Substantial parts of two of those archives survive: the Eanna of Ištar at Uruk and the Ebabbar of Šamaš at Sippar, together running to tens of thousands of tablets. To these must be added the private archives, above all that of the Egibi family of Babylon, which runs across five generations from about 606 to 484 and comprises somewhere on the order of seventeen hundred to two thousand tablets by the careful modern count, though the first estimates of what came out of the ground in the 1870s and 1880s ran to three or four thousand.

Two things about these cities matter more than their antiquity, and both are structural.

The first is that they were not administrative subdivisions of a kingdom. They were corporate bodies with legal standing of their own. They had assemblies. They held charters of privilege — the status the Akkadian sources call *kidinnūtu*, which is best understood as a protected condition placing a city's citizens outside certain of the king's ordinary demands, above all outside conscript labour and certain levies. Whether the privilege was ancient or was manufactured at some particular moment and then given an ancient pedigree is a real question and will be asked properly in its place, but by the seventh century the privilege was a thing that existed, was claimed, and could be appealed to. The literary text conventionally called *Advice to a Prince* — a composition, known from copies at Nippur and in the royal library at Nineveh, that warns rulers of the divine punishments awaiting them if they violate the exemptions of Sippar, Nippur and Babylon — is written in a deliberately archaising Akkadian, with old sign values and old grammatical mannerisms, and the scholarly reading of that archaism is that it is affectation: the text is dressing itself as older than it is. That tells you what the composition was for. Somebody wanted these exemptions to be immemorial, and knew that immemorial was the strongest thing an exemption could be.

The second is that a king was in a real sense the tenant of these institutions rather than their landlord. He appointed to some of their offices; he could and did give them property; he taxed them, quarrelled with them, and installed his own men in their administrations. What he could not do was replace them, because they held between them the country's agricultural capital, its literate class, its calendar, its accumulated knowledge of the sky and the omens, and — decisive for everything this study will examine — the machinery by which a man became king of Babylon at all. In Assyria the great cities had been a bought constituency on the imperial periphery, granted exemptions to keep them quiet. In Babylonia the privileged cities were the centre. The dynasty that comes to power in 626 comes from outside them.

Within the temples, income was held in a particular form that will matter enormously later and should be named now. A *prebend* was a right to a share of a temple's offerings and revenues attached to a specified office — brewer, baker, butcher, doorkeeper, and the rest — held for a stated number of days in the year, and it was heritable, divisible among heirs, leasable and saleable. A man might own a fifth of a day of the bakers' prebend of a particular temple and sell it. Elite wealth in this country was therefore, to an unusual degree, *portable and convertible*: it could be split, priced in silver, moved and turned into something else. That is very nearly the opposite of the great landed magnate holdings on which the Assyrian aristocracy sat, and the corpus

this study belongs to has proposed that the form of elite capital predicts how violent an accession will be. Babylonia is where that proposal gets tested, and the reader should note the setup now.

The god who arrived late

Now the harder point, and the one that governs how the rest of this study reads the Babylonian order.

The arrangement Nabopolassar took over presented itself, and was experienced by everyone inside it, as simply how the world was: Marduk was the king of the gods, Babylon was his city, and the man who held Babylon held it because Marduk had chosen him. This was not a veneer. It was the ordinary furniture of reality for every Babylonian alive, and by the seventh century it was old enough that no living person could have told you when it had not been true.

It had not always been true. Marduk is barely present in the third-millennium record. He was the local god of a place of no importance on the Euphrates, and his name — written AMAR.UTU — attaches him to the sun god, which may point to Babylon having sat, in very early times, in the cultural orbit of Sippar. His rise tracks his city's, and his city's rise begins with an Amorite dynasty: Sumu-abum founding a small kingdom at Babylon around 1894, and Hammurabi, sixth of that line, conquering the surrounding city-states in the eighteenth century and making Babylon the capital of southern Mesopotamia. The prologue to Hammurabi's laws already foreshadows the theological consequence, and the consequence took centuries to complete. The Kassites, who ruled Babylon for roughly four hundred years from the sixteenth century — longer than any dynasty that came after them, though the absolute chronology is disputed and the figure should be held loosely — invoked Marduk as their own. Then Elam sacked Babylonia in the mid-twelfth century and carried the statue away; and Nebuchadnezzar I, of the Second Dynasty of Isin, broke the Elamites and brought it home.

It is at that point, or near it, that the *Enūma Eliš* was most probably composed — the poem usually called the Babylonian creation epic, though creation is the vehicle rather than the point. What the poem is actually about is the elevation of Marduk to the headship of the gods. He fights the sea, kills her, makes the world out of her body, and the assembled gods confer on him fifty names. Fifty was Enlil's number. Enlil, of Nippur, who had been head of the pantheon for a thousand years, is retired in that gesture, and the retirement is made to look like an orderly handover.

And here is the fact that makes the point unmistakable rather than merely arguable. On the fourth of Nisannu, during the New Year festival at Babylon, the high priest of

the Esagila entered the innermost sanctum and *covered the faces of Anu and Enlil* — the former heads of the pantheon — before reciting the *Enūma Eliš* from beginning to end in front of Marduk. The order did not forget the coup. It did not conceal it. It performed it, in the correct sequence, with the deposed present and their eyes veiled, once a year, for as long as anyone could remember.

The discipline this study holds requires two things to be said about that at once, and it will not do to say only one.

The first is that Marduk's supremacy was made. It was made by identifiable people for identifiable reasons at identifiable moments — an Amorite king consolidating a conquest, a later king converting a recovered statue into a theological promotion — and by the seventh century its makers were fourteen hundred years dead.

The second is that this does not make the belief false, and does not make the Babylonians who held it dupes. Precisely the reverse. A thing that was built and then ran for fourteen centuries is not a lie; it is a construction that became real, which is a more durable object than a lie could ever be, and the Babylonian priest who wept for the god in 626 was not performing anything. The god was the ground of his world. Naming the construction is not debunking it, and the reader who takes it as debunking has missed what the record shows: that this is how orders that last are made, and that the depth of a conviction is no evidence at all about the calculation of its origin. What the naming buys us is different and more useful. It tells us that the arrangement Nabopolassar inherited was itself the residue of an earlier conquest that had run long enough to stop looking like one — and that a conqueror who wants such an arrangement to hold him up must find out, first, what its custodians require, because they will still be there when he is not.

Which raises the question that this study exists to follow. The Babylonian god had a body. Marduk was a statue, in a room, in a building, in a city; and the statue had been carried off by Elamites in the twelfth century, and by Assyrians more than once, and destroyed outright by Sennacherib in 689, and remade by Esarhaddon after. The rite that made a king depended on it. During the years the statue was in exile the New Year festival could not be performed at Babylon, and the consequence was administrative rather than devotional: Esarhaddon, who ruled Babylonia in fact and called himself king of Babylon on his own bricks, never took the hand of Marduk at an *akītu*, and in consequence could not begin counting regnal years as king of Babylon at all. The god's absence did not merely offend. It stopped the clock.

What the ceremony required is a subject for its own module and will be established there properly. For the landscape it is enough to state the structure, because the structure is the study. Babylonian kingship was renewed annually, at the New Year, by a

rite the king could not perform alone, in a building he did not own, in front of a god whose hand he had to take, administered by a priesthood he had not appointed — and on the fifth of Nisannu that priesthood stripped him of his insignia, struck him on the cheek hard enough to bring tears, heard him declare that he had not sinned against the city, and then gave the insignia back. Whatever the ritual meant to the men performing it, its position in the machinery is unambiguous. The right to rule Babylon was in somebody else's keeping, renewably, once a year.

The men who could go into the reeds

The third element in the landscape is the one the cities regarded as an intrusion and the one that produced the dynasty.

From perhaps the tenth century, West Semitic groups moved into the Babylonian countryside — Arameans along the middle Euphrates and the Tigris flanks, and, in the south and along the lower Euphrates, the people the Assyrians called Kaldu, the Chaldeans. They organised themselves as houses named for a founding ancestor, so that a man was a son of Yakin or a son of Amukani or a son of Dakkuri; and the three great houses, Bīt-Yakīn in the Sealand toward the Gulf, Bīt-Amukāni between Nippur and Uruk, and Bīt-Dakkūri to the north of them, had by the ninth century become effective small states with fortified towns of their own. Assyrian reliefs show Chaldeans farming and keeping date gardens and herding cattle and horses, and Assyrian tribute lists record them handing over gold, silver, tin, bronze, elephant ivory and ebony — none of which southern Mesopotamia produces, and which they must therefore have obtained from the trade routes running through their ground. These were not nomads camped at the edge of civilisation. They were wealthy, settled or semi-settled, commercially placed, and increasingly present inside the old cities themselves.

They were also, for two centuries, the single problem Assyria could not solve, and the reason is the marsh. When an Assyrian army came south, a Chaldean chief could withdraw into the reed country where cavalry and siege engines were useless, wait, and come back. The career of Marduk-apla-iddina II of Bīt-Yakīn — the Merodach-baladan of the Hebrew sources — is the demonstration: he took the Babylonian throne, was driven from it, took it again, was driven again, and repeatedly survived a defeat that would have ended anyone who had nowhere to go. Where a population can exit, a state's threats are discounted; and the map of chronic Babylonian rebellion under Assyria and the map of the marshes are, to a first approximation, the same map.

The old urban civilisation regarded these people as barbarians and had done so for three hundred years. That judgement is worth registering precisely because of what happened next: the dynasty that took Babylon in 626 and ruled it until 539 was in all

probability Chaldean. Nabopolassar's origins are obscure and disputed — he has been called a Chaldean, an Assyrian and a Babylonian by serious scholars, and the evidence does not settle it — but the connection to the tribal south is the reading most of the field has favoured, and if it is right then the world's most ancient urban order spent its last independent century being ruled by men its own literature classified as outsiders. What a tribal house does with the tribal structures it came from, once one of its own is sitting in Babylon, is a question this study will have to answer, and the answer is not obvious in advance.

What Assyria did, and what it left standing

By 626 Babylonia had been inside the Assyrian empire, in one arrangement or another, for a century and a quarter.

Tiglath-pileser III took the Babylonian kingship himself in 729 and the Sargonid kings after him experimented with every available way of holding the country: direct rule, a puppet, a viceroy, a royal son, and finally destruction. Sennacherib's answer of 689 was the destruction, and the fact that his son reversed it within a decade is the most instructive single episode in the pre-history of this study.

Esarhaddon's problem on his accession in 681 was that his father had razed the religious centre of the southern half of the empire, and that a very large part of the Assyrian establishment regarded that act as sacrilege. His answer was a piece of institutional engineering of considerable elegance. He rebuilt Babylon, returned its deported population and its looted property, and attributed the destruction not to Sennacherib but to Marduk, who had been angered by the Babylonians' own neglect of their gods. He then had to deal with the length of the sentence, because the decree recorded that the city was to lie waste for seventy years, and Esarhaddon did not intend to wait seventy years. The solution his scribes reached for was available only in cuneiform: the sign for seventy, turned upside down, reads as eleven. The tablet of destinies was declared reversed in an act of divine mercy, seventy became eleven, and eleven years was what the restoration was given. It is difficult to think of a cleaner demonstration of the principle that the men administering a sacred order are entirely capable of operating it, and that their doing so tells you nothing whatever about whether they believed it.

Even so, Esarhaddon could not complete the job, because Marduk's statue was still in Assyria; and so, as noted, the man who rebuilt Babylon and called himself its king never received the kingship of Babylon in the only way Babylon recognised.

Then came the arrangement that failed most spectacularly. Esarhaddon divided the succession, giving Assyria to Ashurbanipal and Babylon to his elder son Šamaš-šuma-

ukīn — with the elder brother in a plainly subordinate position, his orders requiring his brother's approval, an Assyrian garrison sitting at Borsippa inside his own territory, and his officials writing directly to Nineveh over his head. In 652 Šamaš-šuma-ukīn revolted, with Elam, the Chaldean houses, the Arameans, Arab allies and much of southern Babylonia behind him. The war ran until 648. Babylon was besieged and starved; the city fell; Šamaš-šuma-ukīn died in his burning palace; and his memory was systematically attacked afterwards, his images defaced. Ashurbanipal then installed a vassal named Kandalanu, whose background is unknown and whose reign is attested almost entirely by date formulae, and who died in 627.

What happened in Assyria between then and 626 remains genuinely obscure, and this study will not pretend otherwise. Ashurbanipal's own latest attested regnal year is his thirty-eighth, 631, but a later tradition gives him forty-two years, to 627; the discrepancy has not been resolved and the date of his death should be given as a range. What is clear is that within a very short span the Assyrian succession fractured — Aššur-etil-ilāni, a general named Sîn-šumu-līšir, and Sîn-šar-iškun all appear as claimants — and that in the confusion a man in Babylonia seized the vacancy.

And here the point that governs the whole study must be made plainly. Assyria was not simply an oppressor of Babylonia. It was the builder of the machine that Babylonia would inherit and run. The road system, the provincial administration, the relay posts that carried despatches, the practice of mass deportation as an instrument of policy, the vocabulary of imperial office — all of it existed, all of it was working, and all of it passed to the men who destroyed the state that had made it. Nabopolassar and his son did not invent an empire. They walked into one, and the question of what an inheritor can do with an apparatus he did not design, and did not understand from the inside, and had no part in the culture that produced, is the question this landscape hands to the modules that follow.

The comparison should be stated in its bluntest form now, and answered at the end. Assyria ran this machine, in its imperial phase, for roughly three centuries. Babylon ran it for eighty-seven years.

The son of a nobody

The man who took the throne on 23 November 626 tells us, in his own inscriptions, that he came from nothing. The formula he uses is *mār lā mamman*, son of a nobody — and it is a striking thing to find in a royal inscription, because it is an insult. Assyrian kings used the phrase of usurpers, foreigners and men of disreputable origin; it appears as early as a fragmentary annal of Naram-Sin, deriding a Gutian. Nabopolassar applies it to himself. In a foundation cylinder from Babylon he sets it

inside a story: that when he was young, though the son of a nobody, he sought out the sanctuaries of Nabû and Marduk, gave his mind to their rites and to justice and equity, and that the god who watches the deeds of men saw into him and raised him from obscurity to high standing in the land of his birth.

Two things need saying about that, and they pull in opposite directions, which is why the passage is worth dwelling on.

The first is that as an account of a warrant it is nearly perfect, and it is doing something specific. A man with no ancestry cannot claim descent, so he claims election. The absence of a genealogy stops being an embarrassment and becomes the evidence: *nobody could have made me king except the god, because I had nothing else.* Read that way the phrase is not modesty at all. It is a title deed.

The second is that it is very probably not true. Michael Jursa identified, in 2007, a Nebuchadnezzar who had been governor of Uruk under the Assyrians as Nabopolassar's father — which would make the founder of the Neo-Babylonian empire the son of an Assyrian-appointed provincial governor, a man from inside the administration he overthrew, and would explain why he named his own son Nebuchadnezzar. It would also explain something uglier. Under Sîn-šar-iškun that governor's grave at Uruk was violated and his body dragged through the streets, in reprisal for the anti-Assyrian activities of his sons. If that identification holds, then "son of a nobody" is not a statement about origins. It is an erasure — of a compromising Assyrian service record, and perhaps of a desecrated father — performed by a man who had good reason to want both facts out of the record, and who replaced them with a claim no rival could contest because it was not the kind of claim that can be contested. The identification is Jursa's argument rather than a settled fact and should be carried as such; but it is the single most useful thing to know before reading anything Nabopolassar says about himself.

He does say one other thing, and it is worth setting beside the first. In the inscription commemorating the rebuilding of Babylon's inner wall he records that he slew the Subaraean and turned the enemy's land into mounds and ruins, and that as for the Assyrians, he banished their foot from the land of Akkad and cast off their yoke.

That is the whole of it. That is very nearly all a Neo-Babylonian king will ever tell us about a war. C. J. Gadd, publishing in 1923 the chronicle tablet that first dated the fall of Nineveh, put the problem in a sentence that has not been improved on: the New Babylonian kingdom, he wrote, had been historically little better than a blank, since external evidence was of the scantiest, and its own inscriptions, copious as they are, record nothing but building operations, and abstain, with an almost sedulous perversity, from any but the vaguest references to contemporary affairs. An empire that

broke Egypt at Carchemish, took Jerusalem twice and blockaded Tyre for thirteen years left a royal corpus that is overwhelmingly about repairing temples. That silence is not a gap in the evidence. It is evidence, and this study will build on it rather than apologise for it.

What survives instead is a chronicle series — dry, dated, administrative, written by scribes in Babylon and copied for centuries afterwards — and behind it those tens of thousands of business tablets. It is a strange inheritance: an empire that will not describe its own wars, and that recorded the price of barley every month for four hundred years. The tablet Gadd published carries, at its foot, a line that is not part of the history at all. *He that loveth Nabû and Marduk, let him preserve this and not suffer it to leave his hands.* Somebody wanted the record kept. That instinct — the reflex to write it down, file it, and copy it again in the next generation — is the most characteristically Babylonian thing in this landscape, and it is the reason a study of this order can be quantitative where a study of its predecessor could not.

The chronicle itself is worth one last observation, because it says something the scribe did not intend. In its opening lines the scribe names Nabopolassar; thereafter, for seventy-five lines and eight years of war, he calls him only *the king of Akkad*. Akkad was the northern half of Babylonia, and "king of Akkad" was, on the most natural reading of the evidence, the sphere of authority Assyria had assigned to its subordinate at Babylon — the middle and southern cities remaining under governors answering to Nineveh. The man who took Assyria apart is recorded in his own capital's chronicle, throughout, under the title his overlord had given him.

Reading the landscape against the framework

Four things this landscape returns to the framework, one of them a genuine addition.

First, and the addition: a coordination point a stranger can occupy need not be an office. It can be a rite. The corpus's sharpest question about any conquered order has been whether it contains a seat — a post, vested with the power to make and unmake the elite, that a foreigner can sit down in without kinship, creed or marriage. Babylonia contained one, and it was not the throne. It was the annual ceremony at which a man took the god's hand and was thereby king for the year. A ceremony is the most enterable seat in the repertoire, because it demands of the entrant nothing except attendance and the consent of its administrators — no bloodline, no local birth, no shared belief that anyone can inspect. That is exactly why Assyrian kings, Chaldean sheikhs and finally a Persian all found their way into it. The corpus should hold, alongside the office, this second and cheaper form of the same thing, and should note

the trade the form implies: an office is entered once and then held, whereas a rite must be re-entered every year, which converts a single act of submission into a permanent, annually renewed dependency on the men who administer it.

Second, a third failure mode for the thing a warrant is anchored in. The corpus has recorded two: an anchor that is a place can be physically destroyed, as Assur was in 614, taking the coronation with it; an anchor held by an institution can be captured and staffed. Babylonia shows a third, because its anchor had a body. Marduk was a statue, and a statue can be neither destroyed beyond replacement nor captured in the institutional sense — it can be *taken away*. It was taken to Elam, and to Assyria, and destroyed and remade; and while it was absent the rite could not be performed and the kingship could not be conferred, so that Esarhaddon, in undisputed control of the country, could not count a single regnal year as its king. An anchor with a physical body is hostage-able, and whoever holds the object holds a veto over every future accession without needing to hold the country. This is not a variant of destruction or of capture. It is a distinct mechanism with a distinct signature — the throne does not fall, it simply cannot be filled — and it is worth watching for wherever a warrant is vested in a movable thing.

Third, a refinement on how a former conquest naturalises. The corpus has held that an earlier conquest becomes durable by being forgotten — decaying into vocabulary, calendar and common sense until nobody experiences it as a conquest at all. Babylonia shows the opposite route to the same durability. Marduk's displacement of Enlil was not forgotten; it was staged, annually, in the correct order, with the deposed gods present and their faces ritually covered before the poem describing their supersession was read aloud. An order that re-performs its founding coup every year is not concealing anything. It is renewing the ratification — and a supersession that the whole interpretive class publicly re-endorses each spring is markedly harder to reopen than one that has merely slipped out of memory, because there is no buried fact for a challenger to exhume. Forgetting and annual re-enactment are two routes to the same immunity, and the second is the stronger.

Fourth, the standing question this study is set to answer. Two empires, one country, ninety years apart, running the same roads, the same provinces, the same relay system, the same deportation apparatus and the same administrative vocabulary; and the lifespans are roughly three hundred years and eighty-seven. That ratio is raised here and not explained here. The material for explaining it is already visible in the landscape — rain against irrigation, a periphery of bought cities against a centre of privileged ones, non-convertible magnate land against saleable temple prebends, and a warrant lodged in a destructible hill against a warrant lodged in a portable god — and the

modules that follow will have to choose among them. What should be resisted throughout is the reading that eighty-seven years is a verdict. A short run is what the record leaves when a configuration meets a pressure it cannot bear, with the materials its builders happened to have, at the moment the test arrives. It is not a judgement on the men who ran it, and it is not proof that the thing was doomed from the day it was built.

A note on sources. Sennacherib's account of the destruction of Babylon is quoted exactly from the Bavian inscription in D. D. Luckenbill's *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago, 1926–27), which is in the public domain; the phrase rendered "made it like a meadow" is Luckenbill's and the module's title takes it from him. The chronicle material — the fall of Assur in 614, the meeting of Nabopolassar and Cyaxares over its ruins, the sack of Nineveh in 612, the scribal note "He that loveth Nabû and Marduk, let him preserve this and not suffer it to leave his hands," and the consistent styling of Nabopolassar as "the king of Akkad" — is quoted exactly from C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh* (London, 1923), likewise public domain, as is Gadd's own remark about the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions abstaining "with an almost sedulous perversity" from contemporary affairs. Nabopolassar's statements that he slew the Subaraean and turned the enemy's land into mounds and ruins, and that he banished the Assyrians' foot from the land of Akkad and cast off their yoke, are given in Gadd's 1923 English renderings of the texts published by Stephen Langdon in *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig, 1912); they are therefore translations of a translation at one remove and are flagged as such. The "son of a nobody" cylinder passage is summarised rather than quoted, because the standard English rendering is Rocío Da Riva's copyrighted 2013 edition; only the Akkadian phrase *mār lā mamman* is quoted directly, and readers should know that the transliterated form given for Nabopolassar's own usage varies slightly across the literature and has not been collated here against the tablet.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Michael Jursa on the sixth-century agrarian expansion, on taxation and city exemptions, and for the 2007 identification of the Uruk governor Nebuchadnezzar as Nabopolassar's father; Rocío Da Riva on the royal inscriptions; Thorkild Jacobsen and Robert McCormick Adams for the salinisation thesis, which is noted here as contested and substantially revised rather than adopted; Grant Frame and J. A. Brinkman on Assyrian rule in Babylonia; Jamie Novotny on the dating and strategy of Esarhaddon's Babylon inscriptions.

The weakest links in this module, stated on its face rather than buried. Nabopolassar's ethnic origin is genuinely unresolved: Chaldean is the majority reading and is used here with that caveat, but Assyrian and Babylonian origins have both been

argued by competent scholars and the evidence does not decide it. Jursa's identification of his father is an argument, not a datum. Ashurbanipal's death is given as a range, 631 to 627, because his latest attested regnal year and the later literary tradition disagree and the discrepancy is unresolved. The length of the Kassite dynasty is given as roughly four centuries because the absolute chronology of the second millennium remains disputed. Babylon's walled area is put at about 890 to 900 hectares and its population at something on the order of one to two hundred thousand; the first figure is archaeological and reasonably firm, the second is a density estimate and should be treated as an order of magnitude. The length of Sennacherib's siege of 689 is given as a range because the sources differ. The claim that irrigation agriculture concentrates labour where rain-fed agriculture does not is stated here as a property of the hydrology and is *not* yet applied to the deportation policy; that application is a hypothesis this study will test rather than a finding it has made. Finally, the description of the New Year rite draws on a ritual text preserved in copies later than the period under study, a difficulty recent scholarship has pressed and which will be confronted directly when the ceremony is examined in its own right rather than sketched, as here, for orientation.

MODULE 1

Every Shoulder Was Peeled

Module 1 · The Floor of Force — what the Babylonian army could actually do, who paid for it and equipped it, where its reach stopped, and how to reconstruct an army from an empire that refused to describe one

Twenty-one days

In the early summer of 605 BC a crown prince took an army across the Euphrates at Carchemish and destroyed the Egyptian expeditionary force holding the crossing. The chronicle kept in Babylon records it in about six lines and the lines are not modest: the Egyptians broke; the survivors who got clear so fast that no weapon reached them were run down four hundred kilometres away in the district of Hamath; not one of them got home. It was the last time the two great powers of the age met in open battle for a generation, and it settled who would inherit Assyria's western provinces.

Then Nabopolassar died — on the eighth day of Abu, our fifteenth of August — and his son, six hundred kilometres away in northern Syria with an army in hand, had to reach Babylon before anybody else reached the throne.

He was on it on the first of Ululu, our seventh of September. Three weeks, from somewhere in the Syrian theatre to the royal seat, in a country with no bridges over its two great rivers.

That figure is the first hard thing this module has to work with, and it is worth pausing over, because it is not a fact about Nebuchadnezzar's energy. It is a fact about a road system, a relay of posts, remounts at intervals, and provincial officers who would honour a courier's authority in a province whose overlord had just died — and none of it was Babylonian in origin. Every kilometre of it had been laid down by the empire this dynasty had spent seventeen years dismantling. The son of the man who turned Nineveh into a mound rode home to be crowned along Assyrian roads.

That is the whole of this module's problem in one image, and it can be put as a question: what exactly did Babylon inherit when it inherited the Assyrian military machine, and what could that machine do once it was in different hands?

The question is harder to answer here than for almost any comparable empire, for a reason that has nothing to do with the army and everything to do with the genre. Neo-Babylonian kings did not write campaign narratives. There is no Babylonian equivalent

of Sargon's letter to the god describing the crossing of Mount Simirria with bronze pickaxes and an engineer arm. Nebuchadnezzar reigned forty-three years, broke Egypt at Carchemish, took Jerusalem twice, held Tyre under blockade for thirteen years and campaigned into Arabia — and in the whole of his enormous inscriptional corpus he never names a single enemy or a single battle. The point was already visible to the compilers of the 1915 *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, who put it flatly: in the numerous building and honorific inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar he makes no mention by name of his foes or of his battles. C. J. Gadd, publishing the chronicle of Assyria's fall in 1923, said the same of the whole dynasty: its own inscriptions, copious as they are, record nothing but building operations, and abstain, with an almost sedulous perversity, from any but the vaguest references to contemporary affairs.

So the army has to be built up sideways, from four kinds of evidence that were never meant to describe it: a terse chronicle that lists campaigns without narrating them; the account books of temples that were required to supply it; the documents of the people it was arriving to destroy; and, once, a dated oracle written inside the empire by a deportee who knew exactly what the great siege had cost.

The temple that armed the archers

Start where the evidence is thickest, which is not where anyone would expect.

The best surviving documentation of the Neo-Babylonian armed forces is in the account books of the Ebabbar, the temple of Šamaš at Sippar, and the Eanna, the temple of Ištar at Uruk. Not in a war ministry, not in a muster roll of the palace — in the books of two religious corporations, filed under expenditure.

What the records show, in John MacGinnis's reconstruction of them, is that when the crown wanted troops it did not reach into a standing force of its own. It sent an order to the temples, and the temples raised the men, mostly from their own agricultural dependants, and equipped them, and paid for it. Free citizens and holders of service land were levied too, and mercenaries were hired; but the institution doing the visible work of assembling and outfitting a contingent, in the documents that survive, is the temple.

The Akkadian for what the temple had to provide is *rikis qabli* — the girding of the loins. It divided into two parts. There were consumables, *ṣidītu*, the food and clothing a man needed for a season in the field, which had to be found every year; and there was the gear itself, weapons and equipment, which lasted and had to be found once. The lists survive, and they are the most concrete thing in this module. One Sippar document issues a body of fifty men with fifty mountain garments, fifty tunics, fifty caps, fifty pairs of shoes, leather containers, five donkeys, ten sacks, five pack saddles

and five girths. Others issue archers twenty-five, or forty, or fifty arrows apiece. The Ebabbar's total dependent population has been estimated at something in the region of three thousand people, and estimates of the number of bow-holdings at Nippur — parcels of land held on the obligation to produce an equipped archer — run as high as two thousand, though the Nippur figures come mainly from the Persian period and should be handled as an indication rather than a Neo-Babylonian datum.

Sit with the shape of that, because it is the single most important structural fact this module has to hand.

An Assyrian king had a standing corps, the *kiṣir šarrūti*, kept in arms all year and paid in daily rations and in land, with recruitment officers attached to the provinces who answered upward to the palace rather than sideways to the governor, and whose houses the governors were obliged to build. That is a payroll, run by clerks, audited, and it belonged to the king. What the Babylonian record shows instead is a requisition. The men, the shoes, the arrows and the donkeys came out of the endowments of ancient corporate institutions with their own charters, their own assemblies, their own priesthoods and their own accounts — institutions the king could command but did not own, and with whom, on the evidence of the correspondence, his officials argued.

Two cautions have to be entered before that is allowed to carry weight, and they belong on the face of the module rather than in a footnote.

The first is that this may be an artefact of what happens to survive. Temple archives were kept in temples, and temples were excavated; palace archives were kept in palaces, and the palace archives of Neo-Babylonian Babylon are, by comparison, almost gone. It is entirely possible that a royal military establishment existed on an Assyrian scale and left its records in a building that has not given them up. Anyone arguing from this evidence is arguing partly from a hole in the ground.

The second is that the temples were not the whole of it. The record names royal officials in military roles, mentions troops of the king, and shows mercenaries in service. The finding is not that Babylon had no royal army. It is that the mobilisation the documents let us watch runs through institutions outside the palace, and that this is a genuinely different arrangement from the one across the northern border ninety years earlier.

There is a second observation the archives support and it points the same way. The Eanna of Uruk had a workforce stationed at Tyre during the western campaigns, and sent silver west to pay hired labourers there. A temple in the deep south of Iraq was running a labour operation on the Phoenician coast, on the crown's business, out of its own funds. Whatever else the Babylonian empire was, its logistics ran on the balance sheets of the gods.

The circuit

Now the campaigns themselves, and here the chronicle is worth reading not for its content but for its rhythm.

Take the years after Carchemish in order. In his accession year Nebuchadnezzar went back to the west, moved through the country until early in the following year, and brought its heavy tribute home. In his first year he mustered in late spring, went west again, and — the chronicle's phrase, in the modern rendering, is that he "marched about unopposed" — moved through the Levant until the end of the year, receiving the tribute of all its kings, before taking and destroying Ashkelon, which he reduced, in a formula the Assyrians had used of their own conquests and the Babylonians had used of Nineveh, to a mound and heaps of ruins. In his second year he assembled a powerful army, went west, and again moved unopposed, the text mentioning siege towers in a broken passage. In his third year he went west and came back with spoil. In his fourth year he went west and marched unopposed once more.

Four consecutive years of an annual armed circuit through a region in which nothing stood up to be fought.

It is easy to read that as a picture of overwhelming dominance, and in one sense it is. But look at what the king is actually doing, and at what he has to keep doing. He is mustering an army every year, moving it a thousand kilometres, showing it to a series of local rulers, collecting their payments, and bringing it home before winter. Nothing in this is conquest in the sense of occupation; there is no Babylonian provincial reorganisation of the southern Levant on the Assyrian model, no network of governors' seats, no colonists brought in. What the Babylonians had was the ability to arrive anywhere in the region in force, and the demonstration had to be repeated. Tribute was not a standing revenue that continued when the army was elsewhere. It was the price of not being visited, and the price had to be re-quoted every spring.

That is a particular kind of power and it has a particular vulnerability, which showed up the moment the annual demonstration failed.

The line that could not be crossed: Egypt, 601

In the winter of his fourth year, at the end of 601, Nebuchadnezzar did not stop at the edge of the Levant. He took the lead of his army and marched on Egypt. The king of Egypt heard he was coming and mustered.

The chronicle's account of what happened next is four lines long and it is the only place in the whole surviving Neo-Babylonian record where a king's scribe admits something went wrong. The two armies met in open battle; they struck each other;

both inflicted heavy losses; and the king of Akkad turned round and went home to Babylon.

Then the next entry. In his fifth year the king of Akkad stayed in his own land and gathered chariots and horses in great numbers.

An empire's chronicle does not record a year at home rebuilding the mounted arm unless the mounted arm needed rebuilding. The scribe has written *mutual heavy losses* and then, without comment, has written the consequence in the following line, and the two lines together are as close to an admission of defeat as this genre produces. The reason Egypt was where the reach ran out is not mysterious: between the last friendly base in the southern Levant and the Egyptian delta lies the Sinai, a hundred and fifty kilometres of desert with almost no water on it, which an army must cross carrying everything it will eat and drink and arrive at the far end already spent, facing a defender who has not moved and is standing on his own supply. Assyria had crossed it, twice, and it had taken Assyria a century of building up the Levantine base and had nearly broken Esarhaddon. Nebuchadnezzar tried it once, in his fourth year, at the head of an army four years into an annual cycle of long marches, and came back.

And the price of the failure was collected almost immediately, on the far side of the map, by people who had been watching. Within months of the Egyptian battle, Judah stopped paying. The Hebrew account puts it plainly enough — Jehoiakim had served three years and then turned and rebelled — and the timing is not a coincidence about anyone's character. A tributary paying to avoid a visit is running a continuous estimate of whether the visit can still be made, and in 601 the estimate visibly changed. That is what it means to hold a country by annual demonstration rather than by occupation: the whole structure is revalued every time the demonstration is checked, anywhere.

Judah's revaluation turned out to be wrong. In his seventh year, in the winter month of Kislimu, Nebuchadnezzar mustered, went west, invested the city of Judah, and on the second day of Adar — our sixteenth of March, 597 — took it and captured the king. He installed a king of his own choosing, took heavy tribute and sent it to Babylon.

That entry is worth two remarks. The first is that it is, so far as anyone knows, the only cuneiform document that records the fall of Jerusalem, and it does so in three lines with no adjectives. The second is the date. Almost nothing in ancient history is dated to the day; this is, and it is dated by a scribe in Babylon who thought the event ordinary enough to file with a note of the month and the number.

The line that could not be crossed: water

The second boundary is the one that shows what an inherited machine can and cannot do, and it is the reason this module carries the title it does.

Tyre was a Phoenician city built partly on the mainland and principally on an island a few hundred metres offshore. Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for thirteen years. The figure comes to us only through Josephus, who took it from the Phoenician civic records and gives it twice; in Whiston's translation of *Against Apion* it reads, in the enumeration of the Tyrian kings, that *Nabuchodonosor besieged Tyre for thirteen years, in the days of Ithobal, their King.* The dates are disputed — the siege is usually placed between about 586 and 573, though earlier starting points have been argued — and the source is a Jewish historian of the first century AD quoting a lost Phoenician list, which is about as many removes as this study will accept for a load-bearing figure. It should be carried as a strong tradition rather than a document.

What is not in doubt is the outcome, because there is a contemporary witness to it, writing inside Babylonia, in a dated oracle, who had every reason to know. Ezekiel, a deportee priest of the 597 removal living among the Judaean settlements in Babylonia, records in the twenty-seventh year of the exile — about 571 BC — what the Lord had said to him:

> *"Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it."*

Strip the frame and read what is being reported. The army worked. It worked so hard that the men's heads went bald under their loads and the skin came off their shoulders. And it was not paid, because the city did not fall and there was nothing to take. The passage goes on to say that Egypt will be given to him instead, as wages for his army — which is a prophet solving a bookkeeping problem, and which is also, incidentally, the clearest surviving statement of what an ancient army was for and what its soldiers expected out of a campaign.

Consider what those bald heads and raw shoulders were doing. They were carrying earth and stone. The classic Assyrian answer to a fortified place was the assault ramp — the one surviving specimen, at Lachish, is on the order of fifteen thousand tonnes of fill moved by hand — and it works against a wall standing on ground. Against an island it does nothing whatever, because the only way to reach an island is by sea, and reaching it in force requires a fleet: warships, crews, a naval command, ports, and the institutional memory of how to fight on water. Assyria had never really had one either,

and had solved Phoenicia by leaning on Phoenician ships. Babylon inherited the roads, the ramps, the siege towers, the pickaxes and the engineers. It did not inherit a navy, because there was none to inherit, and it did not build one.

So the Babylonian floor of force had a shape, and the shape can be stated precisely. Within a radius running from southern Mesopotamia to the Levantine coast and the desert margin, it could arrive anywhere, in strength, in a season, and take any city standing on ground. Beyond that radius it could not go: not across the Sinai to Egypt, not across a few hundred metres of water to Tyre, and — on the evidence of the ninth year, when the Babylonian and Elamite armies came within a day's march of each other on the Tigris and the Elamite king turned round and went home without a fight — not eastward either, where what it had was deterrence rather than conquest.

That radius was fixed in 605 and it never moved again. Everything Nebuchadnezzar held at his death in 562 he had held by 594. The empire won its territory in one battle, in the first year, and spent the next forty-three re-collecting it.

Seen from underneath

The floor is a thing that happens to people, and for once in ancient history there is a document written by the people it was happening to, on the day, while it was happening.

In 1935 the excavators at Tell ed-Duweir, ancient Lachish, found a group of inscribed potsherds in the guardroom of the city gate — letters and drafts of letters, in classical Hebrew, from a Judaean officer in a forward post to his commander in the fortress, dating to the last months before the Babylonians arrived. In the fourth of them, after routine business about a document and a man named Semachiah, comes this, in the modern rendering:

> *"And may my lord be apprised that we are watching for the fire signals of Lachish, according to all the signs which my lord has given, because we cannot see Azekah."*

The Judaean fortresses passed messages by beacon. The writer is telling his commander that he is still picking up Lachish's fires, and that Azekah's have stopped.

Now put beside it the book of Jeremiah, describing the same weeks:

> *"When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah."*

Two of the three named places are the two in the ostracon, and the ostracon records the moment one of them went dark. There is no comparable pairing anywhere in this collection: a prophet's list of the last standing fortresses of a kingdom, and a serving officer's note that one of them has stopped signalling.

That is what the Babylonian floor looked like from underneath. Not a battle — there was no field battle in Judah in 588 that anyone recorded — but a methodical reduction, fortress by fortress, of a small kingdom's defended places, conducted from a forward headquarters at Riblah on the Orontes, while the capital sat under investment for something between a year and a half and two and a half years and starved. When Jerusalem fell, in 587 or 586 — the year is genuinely disputed and both are defensible — the city was burnt, the temple destroyed, the walls thrown down, and the king taken to Riblah, where his sons were killed in front of him and he was blinded and carried to Babylon.

The floor was entirely real. This module's argument about its radius is not an argument that it was weak. Inside the radius, on ground, against walls, it was as good as anything in the world.

The other thing the army was

There is one more entry in the chronicle and it is the strangest, because it is the only internal event in the whole surviving document.

In his tenth year, from about November 595 to January 594, the king of Akkad was in his own land, and there was rebellion in Akkad. He killed many of his own soldiers with weapons. He captured his enemy with his own hand.

Then, a few weeks later, he went west as usual and collected the tribute.

Nothing else survives about this. We do not know who rose, or why, or what the enemy the king took with his own hand was called. What can be read off the entry is only the shape: that ten years into the reign of the empire's greatest king, at the height of the annual circuit, the instrument that made the order possible turned on the man holding it, and had to be put down with the sword by the man himself.

An army capable of reducing Judah is an army capable of removing a king, and the same capacity is the same capacity. This is not a Babylonian peculiarity; it is the standing condition of every state that has ever needed soldiers. But it is worth marking here, in the module about the floor, that the record's only glimpse inside the Babylonian military establishment is a glimpse of it in revolt — and worth marking, too, that a king who had spent four years mustering the temple levies of Sippar and Uruk had good reason to think about who else those levies might one day be mustered by.

Reading the floor of force against the framework

Three things, and the second is the one that will run through the rest of this study.

First: an inherited capacity for reach operates at the radius it was built for, and an inheritor rarely extends it. The corpus has held that some floors monopolise an instrument and others monopolise the ability to deliver force at distance — that the second kind has a boundary that is a radius rather than a line, must be re-demonstrated every season to price anything, and grows by consuming the floors it defeats. Babylon confirms the first three clauses and refutes the fourth in an instructive way.

The re-demonstration is there in the chronicle's rhythm, four straight years of marching unopposed through a region that had already submitted, because tribute paid to avoid a visit is a price that lapses the moment the visit stops being credible. The pricing mechanism is there too, and it is dated: Judah stopped paying within months of the one battle in which the Babylonian army was visibly checked, and there is no need to posit anything about Jehoiakim's temperament to explain it.

But Babylon did not grow. It took its radius whole, in a single afternoon at Carchemish, from an empire that had spent three centuries assembling it, and then never pushed the boundary outward again in eighty-seven years. The reason is worth stating precisely, because it is not laziness and it is not decline. **Reach is not roads.** Roads are necessary and nowhere near sufficient. Reach is a bundle of specific capabilities assembled against the specific obstacles the builder happened to face — and Assyria had built against mountains, rivers and walled towns on solid ground, which is why its characteristic instruments are the bronze pickaxe, the goatskin raft and the assault ramp. Every one of those transferred to Babylon intact. None of them addressed water, and none addressed a hundred and fifty kilometres of waterless desert. An inheritor gets the capabilities; he does not get the two centuries of institutional learning that would let him grow a new one, and he is generally not in a position to notice that he needs it until he is standing on a beach looking at an island, thirteen years into a siege, with his soldiers' shoulders bleeding.

So the refinement: **an inherited floor of reach is bounded not by the roads it acquired but by the obstacles its builder happened to have solved, and the first unfamiliar obstacle is where it stops permanently.** Watch for it wherever a conquest passes to a successor who did not design the instrument.

Second, and the large one: Babylon's floor ran on requisition from institutions that also held the warrant. Assyria's army was a payroll. It was recruited by officers who reported past the provincial governors directly to the palace, paid in rations and service land, audited, and answerable to the king alone. Babylon's army — on the evidence that survives, with the caveat about the missing palace archives stated in full

above — was assembled by sending orders to the great temples, which raised the men from their own dependants, bought their shoes and their arrows out of their own endowments, provisioned them for the season, and sent a workforce and its wage-silver a thousand kilometres west when required.

Those temples were the same corporations that owned the buildings in which the New Year rite was performed, staffed by the same priesthoods, funded by the same estates. Which yields a structural statement about this order that has no parallel elsewhere in the corpus so far: **the institution that equipped the floor and the institution that conferred the warrant were the same institution.**

Every arrangement this collection has examined has had to solve the problem of an anchor held by somebody the ruler does not control. The usual danger of that arrangement is that the holder can declare the ruler a violator and set the coordination machinery against him. Here the danger is compounded, because the holder is also the quartermaster. A king of Babylon who fell out with the temple establishment was not merely at risk of losing the ceremony that made his year legitimate; he was at risk of losing the body that dressed, fed and armed his soldiers. This is the fact to carry forward into every module that follows, and it is worth naming now, at the start, precisely because nothing in the Babylonian record ever says it out loud.

Third, a small correction to how the corpus reads silence. This study's predecessor learned to read an archive in which the king never loses, and developed the discipline of asking which way a document was facing before asking whether it was true. Babylon supplies the inverse case and it needs its own rule. Here the royal inscriptions face the god and the future rebuilder, and are silent about war altogether; the chronicle faces nobody in particular, is kept for the file, and records a mutual mauling in Egypt and a rebellion in Akkad without embarrassment because it was not written to make anyone look good. **A document that records a defeat is not therefore honest; it is a document with no audience to flatter.** The chronicle's value to us is a by-product of its having been an internal record rather than a public one, and the correct inference from its flatness is not that Babylonians were more truthful than Assyrians but that we happen to have caught a different genre. Ask what the document was *for* before crediting its candour, exactly as one asks before discounting a boast.

A note on sources. The Ezekiel passage is quoted exactly from the Authorised Version, which is in the public domain, as is the Jeremiah passage on the last fortified cities of Judah; Ezekiel's date for the oracle is the twenty-seventh year of the Jehoiachin exile, conventionally about 571 BC. The Tyre siege figure is quoted exactly from Josephus, *Against Apion*, in William Whiston's public-domain translation, where it appears in the enumeration of Tyrian kings drawn from the Phoenician records.

Gadd's characterisation of the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions is quoted exactly from *The Fall of Nineveh* (London, 1923), public domain; the parallel observation that Nebuchadnezzar names no enemy and no battle is from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (1915), also public domain.

The chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar's early years (BM 21946, Grayson's ABC 5) presents a problem this module has handled openly rather than concealed. The tablet was first published by Donald Wiseman in 1956 and the standard English translations — Wiseman's, Grayson's of 1975, Glassner's of 2004 — are all in copyright. Its content is therefore **paraphrased throughout** rather than quoted, with a single short phrase, "marched about unopposed," taken from a modern rendering and marked as such in the text. Readers should be aware that the sequence of campaigns, the wording about mutual losses in Egypt, the year spent gathering chariots and horses, the date of the fall of Jerusalem and the account of the rebellion of the tenth year all rest on modern translations of that tablet, and that the module's argument about the annual circuit is an argument about a pattern in a text I have not collated.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: John MacGinnis above all, on mobilisation and militarisation in the Neo-Babylonian empire, on *rikis qabli* in the Ebabbar, and on the armed forces of that temple; Michael Jursa on the economy and on the archives; A. C. V. M. Bongenaar on the administration of the Ebabbar; the reconstruction of the Assyrian military establishment set against it is Tamás Dezső's; David Ussishkin's excavation supplies the Lachish ramp figures used for comparison. The observation that the Eanna maintained a workforce at Tyre and sent silver to pay hired labourers there is drawn from recent work on the Babylonian temples in the imperial periphery.

The weakest evidence, stated on the face of the module rather than buried. The temple-centred picture of Babylonian mobilisation may be an artefact of excavation: temple archives survive and Neo-Babylonian palace archives largely do not, so an Assyrian-scale royal establishment could have existed and left no trace we have found. The equipment lists are real but some of the comparable material, including the Nippur bow-land figures, comes from the Persian-period continuation of the same archives and has been marked as indicative rather than as a Neo-Babylonian datum. The thirteen years at Tyre reach us through Josephus quoting a lost Phoenician list, and the siege's dates are disputed by more than a decade. The year of Jerusalem's second fall is given as 587 or 586 because both are seriously defended and the question is not settled. The Lachish ostracon is quoted in a modern English rendering of an ancient Hebrew text; the reading is stable across editions but the English is not public domain and the phrasing varies. The duration of the final siege of Jerusalem is given as a range

because the biblical dating admits of more than one reconstruction. And the argument that the 601 engagement was a defeat rather than a draw is an inference from the following year's entry, not a statement in the source; it is the standard reading, and it is an inference.

MODULE 2

Seven and a Half Days

Module 2 · The Settlement — who held the wealth of Babylonia, what the new dynasty gave them and took from them, who was let in and by what gate, and the class the empire created at the bottom out of people it had carried off

Seven and a half days

A tablet from the archive of the Ebabbar at Sippar describes a piece of property. It is not a field and it is not a house. It is this: days seventeen and eighteen of one month, days seventeen and eighteen of a second month, days seventeen and eighteen of a third, and day seventeen and half of day eighteen of a fourth — seven and a half days in all, in the second half of the month, of the baker's prebend in the Ebabbar.

That is a thing a man could inherit from his father, divide among his sons, lease to a neighbour, or sell for silver. It carried with it the right to serve as a baker of the sun god on those days and, more to the point, to take a defined share of what came off the god's table when he had been served. There are over a hundred and fifty surviving texts recording the prices paid for such rights in Babylonian cities between roughly 700 and 150 BC. There was a register: the temple kept a wax-covered wooden ledger in which the holder's name was written, and when a prebend changed hands by inheritance or by sale the old name was scraped off the wax and the new one written in. The wax boards themselves have not survived, but the clay documents refer to the procedure, and one from Uruk records a newly appointed brewer of the Lady-of-Uruk being written into the goddess's ledger in place of his great-uncle.

Hold that object in mind, because everything in this module runs through it. The wealth that mattered in sixth-century Babylonia was not principally land held by lineages, and it was not office held at a king's pleasure. A very large part of it was a claim on the income of an ancient religious corporation, denominated in days of duty, registered in a book, and freely alienable. It was, in the most literal sense, a security.

And the first question the framework asks of any conquest settlement — what did the conqueror find, and what did he have to convert before he could divide it? — gets an answer here that reverses the usual one. In case after case a conqueror arrives to find wealth held in a form that cannot be given away: office-land held at a king's pleasure, lineage land held inalienably by a descent group, collective patrimony redistributed among households. None of those is a thing; each is a relation between persons which

happens to be expressed in access to soil, and the conqueror's first act must be to convert the relation into a thing so that it can be granted. That conversion is normally the whole of the story, and it is normally violent.

Babylonia required none of it. The conversion had been performed centuries before anyone in this study was born. The wealth was already a thing, already priced, already registered, already sold in half-days. There was nothing for a conqueror to do to it.

Which raises the question this module exists to answer: if the property regime needed no conversion and the property-holders were not dispossessed, then what exactly was the Neo-Babylonian settlement?

The dynasty that did not conquer its own country

Start with the fact that makes the rest intelligible, and that the standard narrative of a Chaldean warrior-house storming out of the marshes obscures.

Nabopolassar's father, on the identification argued by Michael Jursa and now widely followed, was a man named Nabû-kudurri-uṣur who held the office of *šākin ṭēmi* of Uruk — governor of one of the great southern cities — under the Assyrians. That is not the biography of an outsider. It is the biography of a provincial official of the old regime who took the top job when the regime came apart, and it explains, better than anything else can, why the Neo-Babylonian settlement contains no expropriation.

There was no Babylonian conquest of Babylonia. There was no warband to seat on confiscated estates, because the men who took Babylon in 626 were already inside the administration; there was no rival propertied class to break, because the propertied class was the one the new king's own family belonged to; and there was consequently no moment at which anybody's title had to be re-issued. The great urban families that held the prebends of the Esagila, the Ezida, the Ebabbar and the Eanna in the year Nabopolassar was crowned were, with individual exceptions, the same families holding them when Cyrus walked in eighty-seven years later. The genuine rupture in the Babylonian urban elite comes much later and from a different direction — after the revolts against Xerxes in 484, when a great many central Babylonian families disappear from high office and several major archives simply stop. That is a hundred and forty-two years after Nabopolassar and fifty-five after the Persian conquest, and it belongs to another empire's story.

So the elite of this order was not created by it. It was inherited, and it was very old, and it knew it. Membership was marked in the most durable way a society can mark anything: by name. A restricted segment of the Babylonian urban population — and only that segment — carried a *family name* in addition to a personal name and a patronymic, so that a man appeared in a document as, say, so-and-so son of so-and-so,

descendant of Sîn-lēqi-unninni, or of Ekur-zākir, or of Egibi, or of Nūr-Sîn. Some of those names were ancestral; some were occupational titles derived from temple functions. Members of the Sîn-lēqi-unninni family of Uruk claimed descent from the figure to whom later Babylonian tradition credited the epic of Gilgamesh. Whether the claim was legitimate or wishful is beside the point, which is that a man's position in the order was stated, in every legal document he ever signed, as a position in a descent.

Two details about that system are worth having. First, it was not universal even among the urban population — it was a marker of a restricted class, not of Babylonians generally. Second, it never took hold at Nippur, which is a useful reminder that Babylonia was not one system but a set of cities with their own arrangements.

The gate, and who kept the key

If the prebend was a security and the family name was the register of who could hold it, then the question of admission becomes the question of the whole settlement: who could get in, and who decided?

The answer, reconstructed by Caroline Waerzeggers from the documents of priestly induction, is that admission ran through a formal procedure with several gates in series. A candidate for priestly office had to be of the right descent and had to be ritually pure, and both were tested: the sources show inquests conducted into a candidate's ancestry and his bodily condition before he could be admitted. If he passed, he underwent the rite the Akkadian calls *gullubu*, "to shave" — a ritual shaving and purification performed in the bath-house before he entered the sacred parts of the temple for the first time. And purity was not a threshold crossed once; it had to be maintained for as long as he served.

That is a closed caste with a written entrance examination in blood and body. But there is a fourth gate, and it is the one that matters for this study: **the appointment required royal confirmation.**

Set that beside the property regime and the shape of the Babylonian settlement becomes visible. The crown did not own the temples' estates and did not distribute them. It did not create the families or their names. What it held was the sign-off on the gate — the power to confirm or withhold confirmation of a man's entry into the class that drew the income. That is a hook, and it is a real one; but it is a hook in the *personnel*, not in the property, and the difference will turn out to matter enormously.

What the crown gave

Now the transfers, and here the record is enormous and has been hiding in plain sight for a century because it has always been read as piety.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled forty-three years and left an inscriptional corpus that is overwhelmingly about rebuilding temples. Esagila and Etemenanki at Babylon; Ezida and the ziggurat at Borsippa; the shrines of the ancient cities, one after another, restored, re-endowed, re-provisioned. The corpus never names a battle. It names bricks.

Read as accounting rather than as devotion, that programme is the Neo-Babylonian settlement, and it is very large. The plunder of Assyria — the accumulated treasure of three centuries of imperial extraction, taken at Assur, Nineveh, Nisibis and Harran between 614 and 609 — and then the annual tribute of the whole Levant, collected under arms every year for four decades, went substantially into the fabric and the endowments of the temples of Babylonia. New land was brought under cultivation and new canals cut; date gardens were laid out on ground that had been under barley; the temple estates grew. Michael Jursa's reconstruction of the sixth-century economy dates the beginning of that agrarian expansion to precisely this period and connects its financing to exactly these receipts.

And every increment to a temple's income was an increment to the value of every prebend drawn on it. A man holding seven and a half days of the bakers' prebend at Sippar in 590 held a claim on a richer table than his grandfather had. Nobody granted him anything. Nothing was written into the wax ledger against his name. He simply got more.

That is the crown's gift to the coordinating class of Babylonia, and it should be stated plainly because the sources never do: **the dynasty enriched the old elite without granting it anything.**

There is a second and much smaller category of transfer, and honesty requires flagging how thin the evidence for it is. Royal land grants to individuals do appear in the period — a fragmentary inscribed prism of the seventh or sixth century in New York records a set of royal grants to members of prominent Babylonian families — but the great stone entitlement monuments of the Kassite and post-Kassite centuries, on which a king's gift of a field to a favoured servant was carved with the symbols of a dozen gods around it and a curse on whoever disturbed it, are not a feature of this period as they were of earlier ones. The visible Neo-Babylonian transfers run to institutions rather than to persons. That is an argument partly from absence, and the absence may be an accident of what survives; but as far as the record goes, this dynasty did not buy men with fields.

There is one document that shows the settlement from the top, and it is the closest thing the period has to a public register. Nebuchadnezzar's court list — the prism known as the *Hofkalender*, of which six columns survive — devotes its first half to the king's relations with the gods and its second half to a list of over fifty office-holders, arranged in ranks: the court officials, the magnates of Akkad, the city governors, the district officials, and the vassal kings of the west. It is not a Domesday Book; it records offices, not holdings. But it is a statement, made in a royal inscription and deposited in a building, of who stood where in the arrangement — and its very shape says what the settlement was. There is a list of offices and a list of gods, and no list of estates.

What the crown took

Against the gift, the take, and it is not property either. It is administration.

Every major Babylonian temple in this period had, sitting at the head of its administration, an official called the *qīpu* — conventionally translated "royal resident." He was the crown's man on the board. Alongside him stood the *šatammu*, the temple's own administrator, and the *šangû*, its high priest. The Eanna documents mention in passing the royal residents of the Ezida at Borsippa and the Emeslam at Kutha, the governors of Kish and Dilbat, the governor of Nippur and the administrator of the temple at Marad, all doing business with one another as a matter of routine. Court records show the same officials sitting together as judges: a case heard at Dilbat by four judges with the *qīpu* and the *šatammu*; a case at Uruk before the *qīpu*, two judges and a temple scribe.

That is capture rather than confiscation, and it is the cheapest form of capture there is. The crown did not take the endowment; it took the chair at the head of the table where the endowment was administered, plus the sign-off on who was admitted to draw from it. The temple went on owning everything it had owned. It simply did so with a royal officer in the room.

The crown also took a share of the income directly, through the tithe and through the royal claim on temple revenues, and its officials audited. And when it wanted something done — troops raised, a workforce sent to the Phoenician coast, silver despatched to pay hired labourers at Tyre — it sent an order, and the temple found the money.

The star on the hand

Underneath the prebendary and the citizen lay two further strata, and the settlement they were in was of a wholly different kind.

The *širku* — the word comes from the verb meaning to give or to offer — was an oblate: a person dedicated to a god, belonging to the temple household, working its land and its workshops. Oblates were marked. Laurie Pearce, working from a document listing iron objects in the Eanna's stores, identifies them as star-shaped branding irons used to mark the individuals dedicated to Ištar and the animals of her herds, and the practice of marking a temple dependant's hand with the symbol of the deity he belonged to is attested elsewhere. Kristin Kleber's formulation of their legal position is the exact one: neither slave nor truly free. An oblate could hold property, could appear in documents, could not be sold as a chattel, and could not leave.

A star, on a hand, for life, applied with an iron that the temple kept in a storeroom and inventoried alongside its other tools.

And then the class this empire actually invented, which is the only part of the Babylonian settlement that was genuinely new: the *šušānu*, the state dependant.

The land, the service, and the mirror towns

Here is where the Neo-Babylonian dynasty did what conquerors normally do, and it did it not to Babylonians but to people it had carried off.

Deportees from the west — Judaeans, and also Ashkelonites, Hamathites, Tyrians, Neirabites and others — were settled in the Babylonian countryside, principally in the underdeveloped land around Nippur, on plots of crown land. The arrangement is what scholarship calls the land-for-service system: the settler received a parcel to cultivate, and in return owed taxes, work obligations and military service. He was designated *šušānu*, which describes a juridical class of state dependants — holders of income-producing property, bound to the land, liable for state service, and protected from being sold into chattel slavery.

They were settled in blocks, by origin, in villages named after the places they had come from. There was a place called Āl-Yahūdu, the town of Judah — the same name the Babylonians used for Jerusalem — and there were others called Ashkelon and Hamath. The Judaean settlements formed an administrative unit, the *šušānu Yahūdāya*, the unit of Judaean state dependants, which is what it was called for the purposes of taxing them and conscripting them. Over two hundred cuneiform tablets from Āl-Yahūdu and its neighbours are known, published in part by Laurie Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch; the earliest are dated to Nebuchadnezzar's thirty-third year, 572/1, and they show ordinary people tilling land, building houses, paying taxes, witnessing each other's contracts and rendering service to the king. Their names contain the name of their god, generation after generation.

The provenance of those tablets has to be stated. They were not excavated; they surfaced on the antiquities market, probably out of Iraq in the 1990s, and were bought by private collectors. Their archaeological context is unknown and their exact location is inferred from their contents. They are, on internal grounds, almost certainly genuine and they are the most important new source for this subject in fifty years; but a study that leans on them should say where they came from.

Now put the two halves of the settlement side by side, because the contrast is the module's finding.

At the top, in the ancient cities, the crown enriched a class whose property it had not granted, whose title did not derive from it, and whose register was kept by a god. At the bottom, in the reclaimed countryside, the crown created a class out of nothing — new land, new villages, new people, all of it held directly of the king on terms he set, revocable in principle, obligated in taxes and labour and soldiers.

The empire ran two settlements at once, on opposite principles, and the second one was the only place where a man's holding was actually held *of* the crown.

The tribes

One further population, and the SEED's question about it deserves a direct answer: what happened to the Chaldean houses once one of their own held Babylon?

The honest answer is that we cannot see them doing anything, and the reason we cannot is itself the finding. Paul-Alain Beaulieu's survey of the late Babylonian material makes the point that evidence for a "Chaldean dynasty" is ambiguous precisely because it lacks self-identification: no Neo-Babylonian king ever calls himself a Chaldean in a cuneiform source. The label is applied to them by outsiders — by the Hebrew writers, and later by the Greeks, for whom "Chaldean" eventually came to mean an astrologer.

The tribal territories do persist as administrative and military realities; officials appear with titles attached to Bīt-Amūkāni and Bīt-Dakkūri, and Chaldeans and Arameans held significant positions in sixth-century Babylonian society. But the tribes as autonomous political actors — the thing that had defeated Assyria for two centuries by withdrawing into the reeds — vanish from the record as counterparties. They are no longer states that negotiate. They are districts that are governed.

And the dynasty's silence about its own origin is exactly the manoeuvre the founder performed on his own genealogy. A man whose father had governed Uruk for the Assyrians and whose corpse was dragged through Uruk's streets in reprisal wrote himself down as *mār lā mamman*, the son of a nobody. A house that had probably come out of the tribal south wrote itself down as nothing in particular. Both erasures

do the same work: they remove a fact that could be used against the claim and replace it with a warrant nobody can audit.

The consideration, and the question that matters

Every settlement hands the bought-in elite something to lose. What distinguishes a durable arrangement from a brittle one is not the grant but what was demanded in return, and this is the sharpest single question the framework asks of any case.

So: what did a Babylonian prebendary owe?

He owed his days. He turned up on days seventeen and eighteen and baked, or brewed, or butchered, or kept the door, and he took his share. He owed ritual purity and he owed the correct performance of an office. He did not owe armed service — no Babylonian prebend obliged its holder to bring men. He did not owe tax collection; the crown had its own officials and its own tithe. He did not owe political compliance in any form written into the instrument, because there was no instrument: nobody had granted him anything to attach a condition to.

The consideration was *liturgical*. The coordinating class of this empire was bound to the crown by an obligation to be present at the rites — which is to say, bound to the one activity that also produced the crown's own title to rule.

Now run the question the framework asks of every recipient down the chain: *if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off?*

For the Judaean smallholder at Āl-Yahūdu the answer is clear and it points one way. His plot is crown land. His village exists because the crown built it. His protection from being sold as a chattel is a status the crown recognises. If the arrangement collapses, he loses everything, and he has nowhere to go.

For the holder of seven and a half days of the bakers' prebend at Sippar the answer is startling, and it is the answer this module was written to produce. His claim is on the god's table. It was on the god's table before the dynasty existed and would be on it afterwards. The register is the temple's wax ledger, not the king's; the estate is the temple's, not the king's; the family name is his own, going back further than anybody could count. The dynasty had made his holding more valuable. It had not made it *his*.

The corpus's rule about settlements is that the grant re-sources the recipient's title — nothing visible changes, same man, same fields, same neighbours, but his claim now comes from a register the conqueror maintains and a court the conqueror runs, and he will defend the arrangement because the arrangement is what makes his holding his. Babylon's rulers never performed that operation on the class that mattered. They could not: the class predated them, its property was already property, and its register belonged to a god.

If the dynasty fell tomorrow, the prebendary of Sippar would be exactly as well off — provided the next man on the throne also endowed the temple.

Reading the settlement against the framework

Three things, one of which is a new item for the card and one of which is a mechanism the corpus has been describing from the wrong end.

First: a fourth family of settlement fiction, which is not a fiction at all — endowment. The card records three, each reaching for a different lie and each doing a different job. *Vacancy* declares occupied land empty, and its job is dispossession. *Recognition* declares un-owned land long-owned, and its job is binding an elite. *Divisibility* declares a collective holding partible, and its job is manufacturing a market where none existed. All three are conversions performed on somebody else's property so that it can be granted.

Babylonia shows a fourth move that requires no conversion and tells no lie: **the ruler does not grant to the elite at all, but pours wealth into the institution the elite already draws its income from, thereby enriching every member without altering a single title.** Its job is *purchasing the consent of an incumbent class you cannot dispossess*.

When is it reached for? Precisely when a ruler comes from inside the order he has taken over and therefore has no rival class to seat and no warrant for expropriation — which is exactly the position of a provincial governor's son who has stepped into the vacancy left by the collapse of the state his father served. It is cheap in political terms and enormously expensive in fiscal ones, because the only currency it accepts is more.

And its defect is the thing this study will spend the rest of its length watching: **augmentation buys goodwill, and goodwill is transferable.** A grant creates a dependency; an endowment creates only a preference for endowers. The recipient's answer to *what happens if this collapses* is not *I am ruined* but *I shall want to know what the next man intends to give.*

Second, and following directly: the corpus's rule about re-sourcing is confirmed here by its absence. The card holds that a settlement binds a coordinating class because the grant changes where the holder's title comes from — same ground, different source, and the source is the tie. That has been demonstrated across the collection wherever the operation was performed. Babylon supplies the control: a case in which an elite was made steadily and enormously richer by a dynasty for eighty-seven years, and was not tied to it at all, because its title had never been re-sourced. **Enrichment is not alignment.** The two are routinely confused because they usually travel together; here they came apart, and the case shows what the difference is worth.

Third: an order can run two settlements at once on opposite principles, and the tie forms at the bottom rather than the top. This is the most counter-intuitive thing in the module and the evidence for it is good. The Babylonian citizen with a family name and a prebend held nothing of the king. The deported Judaean with a plot at Āl-Yahūdu held everything of the king — the land, the village, the legal status that kept him from being sold. Follow the framework's own default question honestly and it returns opposite answers for the two men, and it returns the *stronger attachment* for the foreigner at the bottom.

The corpus has generally looked for the settlement's binding force among the great, on the reasonable ground that great men can overthrow an order and smallholders cannot. Babylonia suggests the audit has to be run at every level whether or not the level can act, because the answer at the bottom is a fact about the order's real constitution even when the men there have no capacity to use it. What that fact predicts here — and the prediction can be tested when this study reaches the end — is that when the arrangement was tested, the people with the least power in it would be the ones with the least reason to want it changed.

A note on sources. No public-domain primary source is quoted in this module, and that absence is itself worth stating: the Neo-Babylonian settlement survives almost entirely in unpublished or recently published administrative tablets whose editions and translations are modern and in copyright. The seven-and-a-half-day prebend division is reported from the published discussion of BM 43178+ in the Ebabbar material; the wax-ledger procedure from a document of the Eanna archive; both are **paraphrased from modern editions rather than quoted**, and the module has been written throughout to describe the documents rather than to reproduce anybody's English. Where a technical term is given in Akkadian — *isqu* for the prebend, *širku* for the oblate, *šušānu* for the state dependant, *gullubu* for the induction rite, *qīpu*, *šatammu*, *šangû*, *šākin ṭēmi* for the offices — the word is ancient and the translation conventional.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Caroline Waerzeggers on priestly initiation, on purity and descent inquests, on Babylonian family names, and (with Reinhard Pirngruber) on prebend prices; Michael Jursa on the sixth-century economy, on the identification of Nabopolassar's father as the governor of Uruk, and on the Eanna letters; A. C. V. M. Bongenaar on the administration and prosopography of the Ebabbar; Kristin Kleber on the status of temple dependants, whose formulation "neither slave nor truly free" is the one this module has adopted; Laurie Pearce on the star-shaped branding irons and, with Cornelia Wunsch, on the Judaean settlements; Paul-Alain Beaulieu on the absence of Chaldean self-identification in the cuneiform

record; Rocío Da Riva for the edition of Nebuchadnezzar's court-list prism; J. A. Brinkman on Babylonian royal land grants; John MacGinnis on the temples' obligations to the crown.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The identification of Nabopolassar's father as *šākin ṭēmi* of Uruk is Jursa's argument and is now widely accepted, but it is an argument, and the module's whole reading of why there was no expropriation rests partly on it; if it fails, the reading survives on the other evidence but loses its explanation. The claim that individual royal land grants were comparatively rare in this period is an argument from absence and may reflect what has been excavated rather than what was done. The Āl-Yahūdu tablets are unprovenanced, having reached the market rather than an excavation, and their location is inferred; they are almost certainly authentic and are treated as such here, but the caveat is real and permanent. The characterisation of the great families as continuous across the whole dynasty is broadly right but not absolute — there was churn, and one visible case is the rent-farmer Šumu-ukīn of the Basia family at Uruk, an outsider to the local urban elite who rose at the beginning of Nabonidus's reign, which is a thread this study will pick up when it reaches that reign. Figures for prebend prices are not given here because the series requires more careful handling than a settlement module can offer; the quantitative work belongs with the cost column. And the argument that the temple building programme constitutes the settlement is an interpretation of a corpus that describes itself as piety; the inscriptions do not say what this module says they were doing, and cannot be made to.

MODULE 3

Bricks and Mud Upon My Head

Module 3 · The Robe — what the founder of the empire did with his own crown, what the king had to submit to every spring in a building he did not own, whose consent the whole performance was purchasing, and the clause the arrangement carried inside it from the first year

What a conqueror buried in a wall

Somewhere in the last years of his reign, having destroyed the greatest empire the world had yet seen, Nabopolassar rebuilt the ziggurat of Babylon and put a foundation inscription in it describing what he had done. Stephen Langdon published the text in English in 1905, and this is his rendering of the operative passage:

> *"To Marduk my lord I bowed my neck. My robe the garment of my royal office I took off. Bricks and mud upon my head I carried. Dupsikkus I put on, and Nebuchadnezzar my first born son, the beloved of my heart, I made carry clay, offerings of wine, oil and ḫibištim along with my people. Nabusumlisir his twin brother, my own flesh, the offspring of myself, his younger brother, my beloved, I caused to work with basket and wagon. My own dupsikku I placed upon him. To Marduk my lord I gave him as a gift."*

The *tupšikku* is the labourer's carrying-basket, the hod. And a few lines earlier in the same text he records something further: that he had an image made of himself wearing one, and buried it in the foundations.

Then the exchange, stated as plainly as any transaction in this collection:

> *"Oh Marduk, upon my pious deeds look with joy and by thy mighty word which is unchanging may the work, the creation of my hands endure for ever. As the bricks of Etemin-anki are fixed unto everlasting days so establish thou the foundation of my throne unto distant days."*

The man who wrote that had beaten the Assyrian field army, taken Assur and Nineveh and Harran, and put the whole apparatus of a three-century empire into his own hands. Nobody in Mesopotamia could compel him to do anything. He took off his royal garment, put a hod on his head, made both his sons carry clay in front of the population, had a statue of himself as a labourer sealed into a wall, and asked in return that his throne be fixed as firmly as the bricks.

Force does not pay for what it does not need. When an apex holding uncontested violence performs a real, avoidable, humiliating act and then goes to the trouble of recording it where it will be found, the expenditure itself is the evidence that some audience required it — and the analytic question is never whether he meant it, which is unrecoverable, but *who was being paid, and in what currency.*

That question organises this module.

Whose recognition the dynasty actually needed

Take the audiences in turn and eliminate.

It was not the conquered. Nothing in the Neo-Babylonian imperial record suggests any attempt to make Judaeans, Tyrians, Ashkelonites or Arabs believe anything about Marduk. No temple of Marduk was built in the west. No conquered population was required to worship him, and none is recorded being punished for failing to. The inscriptions Nebuchadnezzar left in the Lebanon are about cedars and roads: he cut through steep mountains, split rocks and made a straight road so that the timber could be floated to Babylon. When a western vassal stopped paying, what arrived was not a missionary but the army. Toward the conquered, this empire ran no robe at all — which is itself a finding, because where an apex secures overwhelming force and then spends nothing further on legitimation toward a population, that population's belief was not part of what held the arrangement up.

It was not a co-religionist world beyond the floor, because there was none; Marduk was the god of a city and its dependencies, not of a faith with adherents abroad.

It was not principally a rival power. Egypt did not care.

What remains is the audience the previous modules have already identified from two other directions: the Babylonian urban establishment. The priesthoods of Esagila, Ezida, Ebabbar and Eanna; the family-name class that held the prebends; the assemblies and the privileged citizens of the ancient cities. These were people the dynasty had not conquered, could not replace, and depended on for the equipping of its army and the administration of its wealth. They were also, on the identification of Nabopolassar's father as the Assyrian-appointed governor of Uruk, the world the dynasty had itself come out of.

And there is a second audience, easily missed, which the genre of the document names: the *future king who would find the deposit.* A foundation inscription is buried. It is addressed to the god, and it is addressed to whoever next digs down to that layer to rebuild — a reader separated from the writer by centuries, whose good opinion is being solicited across time. Nabopolassar even makes the temple itself a witness: *oh temple do thou unto Marduk report my pious deeds.* This is the exact inverse of the Assyrian annal,

which was written outward and forward to be seen; the Babylonian building inscription was written inward and downward to be found.

What the king called himself

Now the titulary, which is the most compressed statement of any robe and which, in this case, has been sitting in plain sight in a public-domain edition for a hundred and twenty years.

Here is Nebuchadnezzar II, at the head of one of his building inscriptions, in Langdon's translation:

> *"Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; meek and humble, prayerful one, fearer of the lord of lords, caretaker of Esagila and Ezida, legitimate son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, am I."*

And here he is at the head of another:

> *"Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, faithful shepherd, the darling and the satisfaction of the heart of Marduk, grand prince, beloved of Nebo, wise and knowing one, whose ears are ever attentive to the orders of the great gods, the restless official, caretaker of Esagila and Ezida, first-born son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, am I."*

Read those beside what an Assyrian king called himself and the difference is total. The Assyrian titulary is comparative and martial: great king, mighty king, king of the universe, king of the four quarters, the one who has no rival, who trampled, who carried off, who turned the land into ruin heaps. It is a claim about the *person* and it is measured against other persons.

Nebuchadnezzar's is a job description. *Zānin Esagila u Ezida* — Langdon's "caretaker," rendered in modern editions as "provider" — is a functional term: the man who sees that the two great temples are supplied. *Šakkanakku lā ānēḫa*, which Langdon gives as "the restless official," is a governor who does not tire. Meek. Humble. Prayerful. Attentive to orders.

The most powerful man in the world, at the height of a forty-three-year reign, describing himself in a formal royal inscription as the tireless quartermaster of two buildings.

It has been usual to read this as piety, or as a Babylonian cultural preference for modesty against Assyrian bombast. Read it instead as a specification, because that is what a titulary is, and the specification has a property the Assyrian one does not: **it can**

be met by somebody else. No man can be Ashurbanipal; a martial claim is a claim about a particular life. But anyone at all can provision Esagila and Ezida, and anyone who provisions them better has, on the terms the king himself has published, a better claim than the incumbent. This module will return to that at its close, because it is the hinge of the whole study.

The rite the king could not perform alone

The other half of the robe is not a text but a performance, held every spring, and it is where the arrangement's structure becomes visible.

The *akītu* festival at Babylon ran through the first eleven or twelve days of Nisannu, beginning with the first new moon after the spring equinox. Its outline is reasonably secure. There were days of purification and lamentation in the Esagila. On the fourth day the high priest entered the innermost sanctum, covered the faces of the statues of Anu and Enlil — the former heads of the pantheon, ritually removed from Marduk's presence — and recited the *Enūma eliš*, the poem in which Marduk kills the sea, makes the world from her body and receives from the assembled gods the fifty names that had been Enlil's, from beginning to end in front of Bēl. Nabû arrived by boat from Borsippa. The gods went out in procession along the paved way to the *bīt akīti*, the festival house outside the walls — the one occasion in the year when the ordinary population saw the statues at all, since the temple interiors were closed to them. Destinies were determined for the coming year. And at the centre of it, on the fifth day, the king.

What happened on the fifth day is preserved in a ritual text which François Thureau-Dangin published in 1921 with an Akkadian transliteration and a French translation, both now in the public domain. The following is my own English rendering of Thureau-Dangin's French, and the reader should hold it as a translation of a translation.

The king is brought into the Esagila. The craftsmen leave by the door. He arrives before Bēl, and the chief priest — Thureau-Dangin reads his title *urigallu*; modern editions generally read *šešgallu*, the elder-brother priest — comes out of the sanctuary and takes from the king's hands the sceptre, the ring and the mace, and takes his royal tiara, and carries them in before Bēl and sets them down on a seat in front of the god. Then he comes out again, and strikes the king on the cheek. He puts the king behind him, leads him in before Bēl, pulls him by the ears, and makes him kneel on the ground.

And the king says, once, this:

"I have not sinned, O lord of the lands, I have not been negligent toward your divinity. I have not destroyed Babylon, I have not ordered her dispersion. I have not shaken the Esagila, I have not forgotten her rites. I have not struck the cheek of the protected citizens, I have not caused their humiliation. I am mindful of Babylon, I have not thrown down her walls."

Then the priest answers him, and the answer begins *fear not*, and continues with what Bēl has said: that Bēl will hear his prayer, will enlarge his lordship, will exalt his kingship, will bless him for ever, will destroy his enemies and lay low his adversaries. The king resumes the ordinary dignity of his bearing. The priest brings the sceptre, the ring, the mace and the tiara back out of the sanctuary and returns them to him.

And then the last thing, which is the part that matters most and which is almost never quoted:

He strikes the king's cheek again. If the king's tears come, Bēl is favourable. If the tears do not come, Bēl is angry — and, the text says, the enemy will rise up and bring about his fall.

What is in the confession

Look at the list the king recites, because it is not a moral inventory and it is not general.

He denies that he destroyed Babylon. He denies that he ordered its population dispersed. He denies that he shook the Esagila or forgot its rites. He denies that he struck the cheek of the protected citizens — the *ṣāb kidinni*, the people holding the city's charter of privilege — or humiliated them. He denies that he threw down the walls.

That is not a list of sins. It is a schedule of specific acts, and every item on it was performed on this city, within living memory of the dynasty's founding, by Sennacherib in 689: the houses destroyed from foundation to roof, the population deported, the temples and the temple tower thrown into the canal, the walls torn down, the site flooded and made like a meadow.

The city's protections have been written into the king's own mouth and are recited by him, annually, in the negative, on his knees, with his crown on a chair behind him and a priest holding his ears.

And note the reciprocity of the gesture, which is exact and cannot be accidental. The priest strikes the king's cheek. The king must then swear that he has not struck the cheek of the citizens. The same blow appears twice in the same room, ten minutes

apart, running in opposite directions. Whoever composed this scene understood precisely what it was for.

The problem with the text, stated fully

Now the objection, which is serious, and which this module puts on its face rather than in a footnote, because a study that quoted the fifth-day scene without it would be doing something dishonest.

The ritual text is late. Thureau-Dangin said so himself in his preface: the tablets in the third part of his volume, the Babylon New Year rituals, appear not to be earlier than the Greek conquest. They are Late Babylonian copies, from a period — Achaemenid, then Seleucid — in which Babylonia had no native king at all. And a strand of recent scholarship, most forcefully Céline Debourse's, argues that these are not copies of Neo-Babylonian originals but compositions of their own time: texts written by a priestly establishment under foreign rule, describing a kingship that no longer existed, in terms that placed the priesthood at its centre. On that reading the humiliation of the king is not a record of what Nebuchadnezzar underwent. It is what the clergy of a conquered city wished, three centuries later, to say the arrangement had always been.

The objection cannot be dismissed and this study does not dismiss it. But two things survive it, and they are enough.

The first is that the objection, if correct, does not remove the evidence; it relocates it. A document composed by the interpretive class of Babylon about the terms on which a king held office is evidence about what that class understood the terms to be — and a class which believes it holds a licence renewable annually, with a stated ground for revocation, will behave as though it does whether or not the belief is historically accurate. For a study of how orders are held, that is very nearly as useful as the ritual being genuine.

The second is that the constitutive act at the centre of the ceremony — the king taking the god's hand — is independently attested for the Neo-Babylonian period, and not from ritual texts at all, but from the flat administrative chronicle. In Nisannu of 604, in his accession year, having destroyed the Egyptian army at Carchemish the previous summer and marched through the Levant collecting tribute in the interval, Nebuchadnezzar came home to Babylon and took the hands of Bēl and the son of Bēl and celebrated the akītu. The chronicle records it in one line, among the campaigns, as a thing that happened in that month.

And the negative attestation is stronger still, and it is the subject of the rest of this module.

The years it did not happen

Esarhaddon of Assyria ruled Babylonia in fact for twelve years, rebuilt Babylon, called himself king of Babylon on his own bricks, and never took Marduk's hand at an *akītu*, because his father had carried the statue away and it was not there. In consequence — and this is an administrative fact, recoverable from date formulae rather than from theology — he could not begin counting regnal years as king of Babylon. The god's absence did not merely offend. It stopped the clock.

Now the Neo-Babylonian case, which is the same mechanism running in the opposite direction, and which the Nabonidus Chronicle records with a flatness that has been described, correctly, as one of the most damaging documents in the ancient world.

Nabonidus, who took the throne in 556 in his sixties by a coup, and who was not of the Chaldean line and made no claim of descent from any previous king, spent something on the order of a decade at Tayma in north-western Arabia while his son Belshazzar held Babylon. The chronicle's entries for those years are almost identical to one another, and the repetition is the point. Year seven: the king was in Tayma, the prince and the officers and the army were in Akkad; the king did not come to Babylon in Nisannu; Nabû did not come to Babylon; Bēl did not go out; the akītu festival did not take place. Year nine: the same. Year ten: the same. Year eleven: the same.

And then, every time, the same closing clause. *The offerings in Esagila and Ezida were presented to the gods of Babylon and Borsippa as in normal times.*

That last sentence is the one to sit with. The temple did not stop. The daily provisioning went on exactly as before, the priest made his libation and inspected the building, the accounts were kept, the bakers and brewers turned up on their days. Everything in Babylonian religious life continued in the ordinary way. The single thing that did not happen was the one act that required the king — and a scribe recorded its non-occurrence, year after year, in the same register he used for barley prices and troop movements, without a word of complaint or explanation.

An institution that can note the annual failure of the king's renewal as a routine administrative fact, four years running, has already answered the question of whether it needs him.

Forged, redirected, or inherited

One further question the framework asks of every robe: how was the trusted-information position acquired? A coalition can forge one, manufacturing a new authority where none existed; it can redirect one, getting behind a channel the people

already trust and pointing that earned trust at itself; or it can inherit one, destroying the previous occupant and refilling the vacancy.

Babylon is the cleanest case of the middle option in this collection, and its cleanliness comes from the fact that no destruction was involved at all. The dynasty did not have to build an interpretive class, because Babylonia had had one for two thousand years. It did not have to destroy one, because the existing one was not hostile — the Assyrians had been the occupiers, and a Babylonian king restoring Babylonian temples was, from the establishment's point of view, exactly what was wanted. Nabopolassar simply got behind a channel that was already there and already trusted, and pointed it at himself, and paid for the privilege with bricks. It is the cheapest acquisition on the card.

And the price of the cheapness is precisely what the previous module found about the settlement, arriving now from the other side. **A robe you inherit is a robe somebody else's institution keeps for you.** The Esagila had existed before Nabopolassar; its priesthood was not his creation; its endowment was not his gift, only his augmentation; its ledger recorded its own prebendaries, not his servants. He could confirm appointments and put a royal resident at the table. He could not own the thing.

So the seam in this order is neither captured nor genuinely crowded, but something the card does not quite have a name for: it is *held by an incumbent the ruler funds*. And a funder is not an owner.

The clause in the titulary

Which returns to the specification, and to the thing this module was written to identify.

The Neo-Babylonian king published, in his own inscriptions, in the first line, before anything else, that what he was was the provider of Esagila and Ezida. He was not the strongest man; the titulary does not say so. He was not of a sacred line; Nabopolassar had announced he was the son of a nobody and Nabonidus claimed descent from no king at all. He was not the god's kinsman. He was the man who kept the two great temples supplied, and who came every Nisannu to have that certified.

An order whose ruler is defined by an office of service has published a test he can fail and a criterion by which a competitor can be measured. And when the test went unperformed for the better part of a decade while the king sat in Arabia — when the provisioning continued and only the provider was absent — the establishment holding the certification had before it a vacancy that its own theology said someone had to fill.

What arrived in 539, in a Babylonian text written in Akkadian in the standard Babylonian royal idiom, was Marduk looking over the whole world for a righteous ruler to hold his hand, and finding one, and calling him by name. That document belongs to a later module and will be read there against the grain, as a conqueror's manifesto by a party that had every reason to write it. But the form it takes was not Cyrus's invention. It was the form the Babylonian kingship had been advertising for eighty-seven years.

Reading the robe against the framework

First: the revealed-preference test at maximum strength, and what it actually identifies. The card holds that where an apex already holding uncontested force pays a real, avoidable cost for legitimacy, the expenditure is the evidence that some audience required it. Nabopolassar supplies the strongest single instance in the collection: a founder who had just destroyed a three-century empire strips off the garment of his royal office, carries a hod in front of his people, puts his heir under a basket, has a statue of himself as a labourer sealed into a foundation, and writes it all down.

But the case adds a refinement to how the test is read. The expenditure identifies *an* audience; it does not identify *which*, and the instinct is to assume the ruled. Here the ruled were not in the room and did not know it happened; the act was buried in a wall. What the expenditure identifies is the audience the apex could least afford to disappoint — and in this order that was neither the conquered periphery nor the mass of Babylonians but the interpretive and propertied establishment of the ancient cities, whose consent the dynasty needed because it had never conquered them and could not replace them. **The test tells you that somebody had to be paid; to find out who, look for the party whose cooperation the apex could not compel.**

Second, and the large one: a robe cut as a job description names its own succession criterion. This is a genuine addition and it applies far beyond this case.

The card already holds that legitimacy is borrowed from a currency the audience honours. It has not yet distinguished between two kinds of claim that can be borrowed, and the distinction turns out to predict a great deal. A **comparative-martial** claim — I am the mightiest, I have no rival, I trampled the four quarters — is a statement about a particular person's record, and it is non-transferable by construction: no one else can have done what he did, so no one else can wear it, and the claim dies with him and must be rebuilt from scratch by his heir. A **custodial-functional** claim — I am the provider of these temples, the tireless governor, the shepherd who is mindful of the daily offerings — is a statement about a job, and it is transferable by construction, because a job is defined by its performance and performance can be compared.

The custodial robe is much cheaper to wear and much cheaper to lose. It requires no conquests to maintain, which is why an empire that stopped expanding in 605 could go on legitimating itself for eighty-seven years without a single new victory. And it hands to whoever certifies the performance — here, the establishment that ran the certification annually and recorded four consecutive failures in its own books — a criterion by which any other candidate may be found to satisfy the specification better. The corpus has held that an anchor held by an institution with a spokesman is liable to be captured and staffed. This case shows the sharper mechanism: **where the warrant is defined as service rather than as person, it does not have to be captured at all. It only has to be re-awarded.**

Third: a rite that carries a prognostic is a licence with a revocation clause, and the clause is read by the counterparty. The fifth-day text does not merely renew the king. It forecasts him: if his tears come, the god is favourable; if they do not, the enemy will rise and bring him down. That is a contractual term, resolved annually, by inspection, by the party on the other side of the table, in a room from which the craftsmen have been sent out.

The card's account of ceremony has emphasised its function as common knowledge among armed men who must observe one another. That function is real and it is present here — the procession was the one public occasion of the year. But it does not exhaust what this ceremony was doing, because the fifth-day rite had no audience at all: it was private, between the king, the priest and a statue. A ceremony with no witnesses cannot be solving a coordination problem. It is doing something else, and what it is doing is issuing an annual permission with a stated ground for withdrawal. **Add to the card: where a renewal rite is performed in private, look for the licence rather than the signal — and ask who reads the result.**

And hold the objection alongside the finding, because the honest position is that it survives either way. If the fifth-day text records Neo-Babylonian practice, then the kings of this empire submitted annually to a revocation clause. If it was composed later by priests under foreign rule, then it records what the interpretive class of Babylon believed the terms had been — and that belief is the operative fact, since men act on the constitution they think they have.

A note on sources. Nabopolassar's account of carrying the hod, the buried image of himself as a labourer, the prayer that his throne be fixed as the bricks of Etemenanki are fixed, and the two titularies of Nebuchadnezzar are **quoted exactly** from Stephen Langdon, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire* (Paris, 1905), which is in the public domain and gives transliteration and English translation on facing pages. Langdon's renderings are a hundred and twenty years old; where his vocabulary differs

from current usage the module says so on the page — his "caretaker" for *zānin* is now usually "provider," his "restless official" for *šakkanakku lā ānēḫa* now usually "indefatigable governor."

The fifth-day ritual is **translated by me from the French of François Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens* (Paris, 1921)**, which is in the public domain and prints the Akkadian transliteration beside it. This is a translation of a translation and is flagged as such at the point of use. Thureau-Dangin reads the officiating priest's title as *urigallu*; modern editions generally read *šešgallu*. He renders the third confiscated item as a harp; modern renderings generally give a mace. Neither variation affects the argument, but the reader should know the text is not as stable as a single English rendering makes it look.

The Nabonidus Chronicle and the chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar's early years are **paraphrased, not quoted**, for the reason given in an earlier module: Sidney Smith's public-domain 1924 edition was not available to me in this work, and every English translation I could consult — Grayson's, Glassner's, and the adaptations derived from them — is in copyright. The repeated formula about the festival not taking place, the notice that the offerings were presented as in normal times, and Nebuchadnezzar's taking of the god's hand in Nisannu 604 are therefore given in my own words. Anyone building on them should go to the editions.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Céline Debourse on the Late Babylonian date and character of the New Year ritual texts, whose objection this module has adopted at full strength rather than answered away; Sam Mirelman for the framing of the ritual-humiliation problem; Jamie Novotny on Esarhaddon's inability to count regnal years as king of Babylon; Paul-Alain Beaulieu on Nabonidus and on the Babylonian cults; Michael Jursa on the identification of Nabopolassar's father; Rocío Da Riva on the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions generally and on the Lebanon monuments.

The weakest evidence, on the face. The fifth-day scene is the module's most vivid material and its least secure; the whole of the section headed "the problem with the text" exists to say so, and readers who reject Debourse's argument and readers who accept it should both find the module's finding intact, which is the only responsible way to use a contested source. The reading of the titulary as a transferable specification is an interpretation, not a statement the Babylonians made; what is quoted is the titulary, and what is argued is what follows from its form. The claim that the empire ran no robe at all toward its conquered periphery is an argument from absence and is vulnerable to the discovery of evidence that has not yet been found, though the absence is broad and consistent. The chronology of Nabonidus's Arabian residence is given as

"something on the order of a decade" because the chronicle's damaged years leave the exact span uncertain. And the whole of the closing argument about the custodial robe naming its own successor is a proposition this study has advanced and must now test against 539; it is stated here as a prediction, and if the later evidence refuses it, that will be reported.

MODULE 4

Increased There, and Not Diminished

Module 4 · Formation — what installed the world in a Babylonian child, what the empire did and did not do to the children of the people it carried off, why one of those two framings survived and the other did not, and what a labour policy turned out to have made without anyone intending it

The letter

Some time after 597, and probably not long after, a letter went from Jerusalem to the people who had just been carried out of it. The Hebrew record preserves it, names the two men who carried it, and gives its instructions. The relevant clauses, in the Authorised Version:

> *"Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."*

Now set beside it a document of a different kind, from a hundred and fifty years earlier and three hundred miles north, in which a provincial official writes to the king of Assyria about a group of deported Aramaeans. The king has sent an instruction, and the official quotes it: *they are to have wives.* Suitable local women have been found in numbers. The difficulty is that their fathers will not give them without payment, and so the official asks the crown to meet the bride price.

Two documents, a century and a half apart, about the same problem, from opposite sides of it. Both are about who marries whom. Neither mentions belief, doctrine, teaching, schooling or worship. And both are correct about where the thing they are fighting over actually lives.

Because formation is not education, and reading it as education is the error this module exists to avoid. What a child acquires in his first years is not a set of opinions that he might later be argued out of. It is the whole apparatus by which he will afterwards judge everything: who counts as a legitimate authority, whose word may be taken without checking, which people are *his* people, what is beyond argument, what

the story of the world is and where he stands in it. He acquires it before the faculties that would screen it have matured, and by the time he could weigh it his entire life is built on top of it. And he acquires it not principally by being taught but by growing up among people who all, without ever discussing it, take the same things for granted — which is why the operative variable is never the curriculum but the *composition of the household and the street*.

There is no unformed person. To be unformed is to be feral. A conqueror therefore never faces a choice between forming the conquered and leaving them alone, because leaving them alone is not among the outcomes. He faces only the question of *by whom*, and if he declines the job the framework already running goes on running and hands the next generation a world in which he is a stranger.

Assyria understood this and acted on it, at the level of the marriage bed, with a budget line.

Babylon did not act on it at all. What happened instead is the subject of this module.

What made a Babylonian

Before the deportees, the natives — because the first thing to establish is what the framework was that Babylonia might have installed in anybody, and whether it was portable.

Begin with the child's name, since it was the first thing he had and the thing he heard most. Babylonian personal names were overwhelmingly theophoric: they contained a god, and usually a sentence about him. *Nabû-apla-uṣur* — Nabû, protect the son. *Nabû-kudurri-uṣur* — Nabû, watch over my heir. *Bēl-uṣuršu* — Bēl, protect him. Inhabitants of the great cult cities characteristically bore names naming their own city's deity, so that a man's name announced where he was from and whose he was every time anybody called him. A child was addressed, thousands of times before he could reflect on it, by a short sentence asserting that a particular god was watching him.

If he belonged to the restricted class this study has already met, he had a second name as well: a family name, marking descent from an ancestor or from a temple office, recited in every legal document he would ever sign. His place in the order was not something he learned. It was his identification.

Then the year, which in Babylonia was not a neutral container but a liturgy. The calendar was the festival calendar. Every month had its *eššēšu* days; the great cities kept hemerologies stating which days of which month were propitious for which activities, and the versions of the major cities had been collated into a standard national text as early as the fourteenth century. The year opened in Nisannu with the eleven or twelve

days of the New Year festival — the only occasion on which the ordinary population saw the gods at all, since the temple interiors were closed to them, and the one day of the year when the statues came out along the processional way and went to the house outside the walls. Everything a Babylonian did was dated by the reign of a king and the month of a god. To say *when* was to say *whose*.

Then the temple itself, which was not a church that people attended but the largest employer, landlord, granary and law-court in the city, whose oblates wore a star branded on the hand, whose prebendaries turned up on their days, whose canals watered the fields, and in whose forecourt the disputes were heard. A Babylonian did not have a religion in the modern sense of a set of beliefs he held. He had a city, and the city had a god, and the god had a house, and the house ran the economy.

And at the top, for the small class that could reach it, the scribal curriculum — and here the picture becomes strange, in a way this study should mark.

By the sixth century, training a scribe meant, in its first stage, teaching a child to write sign-lists and vocabularies in Sumerian: a language that had not been spoken by anybody for well over a thousand years. The second stage moved on to the classic literary and religious compositions, copied from exemplars. The whole apparatus of Babylonian high learning — the omen series, the lexical lists, the incantations, the epics — was an inheritance transmitted by copying, and its prestige lay precisely in its antiquity. Scribes signed colophons recording that they had copied from an old original. Texts were deliberately written in archaising sign-values to make them look older than they were; the composition warning kings not to violate the exemptions of Sippar, Nippur and Babylon is a documented instance, dressing itself in a false antiquity because antiquity was the strongest thing a claim could have.

And the last king of this dynasty took the tendency to its limit, digging down under the floors of ruined temples to find the foundation deposits of kings sixteen hundred years dead, in order to rebuild on the original ground plan.

An order whose most educated men spent their formative years copying a dead language, and whose ruler's characteristic activity was archaeology, had been formed with unusual thoroughness *by its own past*. That is worth stating without sneering, because it is also what made this the most learned civilisation on earth in that century, and the astronomy that came out of it was still being practised in the first century AD and underlies our own. But it is a fact about where the authority in that formation was placed, and the placement has a consequence: **when a framework locates all legitimacy in what was already there, the question of what to do about something genuinely new does not arise in a form anyone can act on.** Nobody in Babylonia had the conceptual apparatus for a project of making Judaeans into Babylonians,

because the category of *becoming* a Babylonian did not exist. One was a son of Babylon or one was not, and the difference was recorded in one's name.

Which brings the module to its actual question.

What Babylon did to the deportees, and what it did not

It did not try to form them. That is the finding, and the evidence for it is a broad and consistent absence.

There is no Neo-Babylonian requirement that a deported population worship Marduk. There is no record of any conquered community being punished for the worship of its own gods. There is no missionary activity, no conversion procedure, no schooling for deportees, no equivalent of the Assyrian bride-price letters, no attempt to mix households, no evidence of any policy directed at the beliefs of anybody in the settlements at all. The deportees appear in the record as a fiscal category — *šušānu Yahūdāya*, the unit of Judaean state dependants — because that is what the state was interested in about them. It wanted the canal dug, the barley delivered, the tax paid and the soldier produced.

And it settled them together, in villages named for the places they had come from: Āl-Yahūdu, the town of Judah, and others called Ashkelon and Hamath, part of a general practice across the deported populations of the west.

The temptation is enormous, and it should be resisted, to read that as mercy. Test the unglamorous alternative first, because the position logic demands it and because the mainstream reconstruction of the policy already supplies it: **the mirror towns were a technique for developing agricultural land.** Southern Mesopotamia grows nothing without irrigation, and the Neo-Babylonian period is precisely when the agrarian expansion happened — new canals cut, new date gardens laid out, land brought under cultivation that had not been under it before. That work is lumpy, seasonal and collective; it requires a body of hands assembled at one point on one channel; and a gang drawn from a single origin, sharing a language and an internal structure of authority, digs better than a gang of strangers who cannot understand each other. Add the fiscal convenience — a named, co-located unit is far easier to assess and to conscript than the same number of people scattered — and the whole of the policy is explained without anyone in Babylon having a thought about Judaean identity in any direction.

The comparison with Assyria then has to be restated more carefully than it usually is, because Assyria did not have an identity policy either. Assyria dispersed deportees where it wanted them dissolved into the general population, and it kept them together where it wanted a functioning unit: the same conqueror in the same year broke the

bulk of the Samarian population into parcels and settled it among strangers, and took fifty chariot crews into the royal corps as a named formation under their own officers, and twelve years later the parcels were untraceable and the formation was still on the books as the Samarians. Both decisions were about what the state wanted the people *for*.

So the honest statement of the comparison is this. **Neither empire had a formation policy. Both had a labour policy. Identity was the residue.** Assyria's northern agriculture is rain-fed and does not require concentration, and Assyria wanted its deportees absorbed; Babylonia's agriculture is irrigated and does require concentration, and Babylonia wanted its deportees productive. The outcomes diverged completely, and neither outcome was anybody's objective.

What happened in the households

Now the measurement, and the archive supplies it in the one currency that reaches into the nursery: names.

Of the population appearing in the Āl-Yahūdu texts, something on the order of a third bear Yahwistic names. Analysis of two hundred and sixty-five names from the first generations of exiles, dated between 572 and 477, finds the naming patterns of Iron Age Judah continuing among them essentially unchanged — a high proportion of theophoric names, overwhelmingly Yahwistic, with divine elements other than YHWH or El remaining rare, and the same root dominant in name-formation as at home.

And then the thing that matters most, which is not the survival but the direction of travel. The peak in Yahwistic naming at Āl-Yahūdu falls in the period roughly 552 to 532 — that is, in the second and third generations, forty to sixty years after the deportation, among people most of whom had never seen Judah.

A framework that was merely persisting would decay. This one intensified.

The evidence is not uniform and this module will not pretend it is. Within a single well-documented Judaean family at Āl-Yahūdu, some children bear Yahwistic names and their siblings bear Babylonian ones; individuals appear under variant orthographies, sometimes in a more Judaean and sometimes in a more Babylonian form, apparently depending on the context of the transaction; and a proportion of people with Yahwistic names in Babylonia may descend not from Nebuchadnezzar's deportations at all but from Israelites moved by Assyria a century and a half earlier and drifted south. Naming is a strong indicator and it is not a census of belief. But the aggregate shape is not in doubt: the framework was being handed down, and by the third generation it was being handed down harder than at the start.

Why? The mechanism is in the letter this module opened with, and in the conditions the empire had accidentally created.

The formation was intact because the community of transmission was intact. Nothing had to be taught. A child in Āl-Yahūdu grew up in a village of people who all, without ever discussing it, took the same things for granted — the same god, the same language at home, the same festivals, the same account of what had happened to them and why. That is the whole of the mechanism, and it operates one level below anything that could be called instruction. Assyria's insight was that removing the community ends the transmission without anyone teaching anything. Babylon supplies the control: keep the community and the transmission continues, equally without anyone teaching anything.

But the intensification needs a second explanation, and it is the interesting one.

What is left when the carriers are taken away

Consider what had actually been removed. Not the people — the people were together. What had been removed was every *institutional* carrier of their formation. There was no temple, because it had been burnt. There was no king, because he was a prisoner drawing rations in Babylon, and his successor had been blinded at Riblah. There was no land, no city, no festival calendar tied to a place, no agricultural year that matched the liturgy, no shrine to walk to.

Every one of those had been doing formative work without anybody noticing, in exactly the way the Babylonian carriers were doing it for Babylonians: ambient, unremarked, requiring no effort from anyone. When they are present, a framework transmits itself by simply being the shape of the world. When they are removed, it must either die or become *explicit* — carried by things that can be carried.

And the exilic record shows precisely that conversion happening. The elders of Judah sit in a house in front of a prophet, which is the community of transmission meeting as an institution because there is no other. The sabbath, which requires no building and no territory and only a household counting to seven, is elevated into the sign of the covenant itself — and the name Shabbetai, "one of the sabbath", turns up in the Babylonian documents. Descent begins to be registered with care, because when there is no land to hold, membership must be held some other way. The written text moves to the centre, because a text is portable and a temple is not. And the letter tells the deportees to build houses, plant gardens, marry, and marry their children to each other — which is the household explicitly conscripted as the transmission mechanism, in writing, in the same generation in which an Assyrian official was asking his king to pay the bride price to prevent exactly that.

The Hebrew record also preserves the difficulty being felt, in a form that names the problem with precision: *how shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?* That is a formation crisis stated by the formed. The answer that emerged over the following century was that you sing it differently — from a book, in a house, on a fixed day, among your own — and that answer produced something that could travel.

So the finding, stated plainly: **the removal of a formation's institutional carriers does not necessarily destroy it. Where the community survives the removal, it forces the formation to convert from ambient to explicit — and an explicit formation is portable, which makes it more durable than the ambient one it replaced.** Babylon, by burning the temple and deporting the king and settling the population in blocks on a canal, performed all three operations at once, and thereby ran the conversion.

Nobody intended it. There was no Babylonian who wanted this. There was, so far as the record shows, no Babylonian who thought about it.

The other side of the same test

And now turn the finding round, because the same proposition predicts the Babylonians' own fate and the prediction is confirmed.

What formed a Babylonian was ambient in the purest sense: the city, the temple, the festival calendar, the processional way, the name that named the city's god, the family name registered in the temple's ledger, the curriculum copied from tablets held in the temple's library. Every one of those carriers was fixed to a place. None of it was portable, and none of it ever had to be, because for two thousand years nobody had needed to carry it anywhere.

The consequence is legible in the record's own shape. Babylonian civilisation did not end in 539; it continued under Persians, Greeks and Parthians for five hundred years, and its astronomy ran into the first century AD. But when the temples finally stopped — when the endowments failed and the cults lapsed and the cities emptied — the formation stopped with them, because it had no existence apart from them. There was no Babylonian household practice that could be carried to another country. There was no Babylonian text that a family could keep. There was nothing to take away.

Two peoples, in the same country, in the same century, both formed thoroughly. One had its institutional carriers destroyed and its community left intact, and was forced to make its formation portable. The other kept its carriers for another five centuries and never had to. The one that was broken is here; the one that was preserved is not.

Legibility is not pardon and this is not a moral about the virtues of catastrophe. Most communities that lose their institutions simply lose their formation, which is what happened to the great majority of the peoples Assyria and Babylon moved, and what would have happened to the Judaeans had they been parcelled out among strangers as the northern kingdom had been. The point is narrower and structural: the conversion from ambient to portable is available only where the community of transmission survives the removal, and where it does survive, catastrophe is the pressure that performs the conversion.

Reading formation against the framework

First: the corpus's central formation finding is confirmed by its control, and the control tightens it. The proposition arrived at from the Assyrian evidence was that formation is transmitted not by teaching but by a community that shares it, so that a conqueror who removes the community ends the transmission without touching a single belief. Babylonia runs the same mechanism in the positive direction and yields the same result: keep the community and the transmission continues, again with nobody teaching anything and nobody intending anything.

But running it in both directions permits a sharper statement than either case alone. **Neither empire had a formation policy; both had a labour policy, and the identity outcome was its residue.** Assyria dispersed where it wanted absorption and concentrated where it wanted a functioning unit — the same conqueror, the same people, the same year, opposite treatments, opposite outcomes. Babylon concentrated everywhere because irrigated agriculture on newly opened land requires assembled hands and because a named block is easier to tax. The most consequential cultural fact of the ancient Near East is a by-product of the difference between rain-fed and irrigated farming, and the corpus should record it in exactly those terms rather than as a difference of temperament between two empires.

Second, and the addition: the ambient/portable distinction, and why the destruction of institutions can strengthen a formation rather than ending it. The card holds that formation runs through family, religion, school, ritual and calendar, and that it fills the benefit column early. It has not yet distinguished by *what carries it*, and the distinction predicts survival better than anything else in this case.

An **ambient** formation is carried by the standing furniture of a place — the temple one walks past, the festival that scores the year, the shrine, the land, the king. It is enormously cheap, because it requires no effort from anyone and transmits itself by being the shape of the world; and it is enormously fragile in one specific way, which is that it cannot leave. An **explicit** formation is carried by things a household can hold: a

text, a fixed day, a rule about food, a mark on the body, a genealogy written down. It is expensive, because somebody has to keep it up deliberately; and it is portable, and portability is what survival across a displacement actually requires.

Formations do not usually convert from the first kind to the second, because there is no reason to pay the cost while the carriers are standing. **The conversion is forced by the destruction of the carriers — and it can only happen where the community survives the destruction.** Where both conditions hold, an attack on a formation's institutions produces not its end but its hardening into a portable form more durable than what it replaced. Where the community does not survive, the same attack simply ends it.

That yields a testable rule for the corpus, and it should be checked against other cases: **look at what a formation is carried by before predicting what will happen to it under conquest.** A conqueror who destroys the temples of a people he has left standing together has not disarmed them; he has removed the cheap version of their framework and obliged them to build the expensive one.

Third, a note on the conqueror who never faced the question. The card holds that a conqueror who declines to form the conquered has not chosen neutrality but conceded the ground. Babylonia complicates the phrasing usefully, because the European colonial cases from which that formulation was drawn involved a conqueror who *considered* forming the conquered and declined, because forming them would have meant admitting them and admission was the thing he would not give. Babylon did not decline. **The question never arose**, because the framework this order ran on had no category of acquired membership at all — one was a son of Babylon or one was not, it was recorded in one's name and one's genealogy, and there was no procedure by which a Judaean could have become anything else even had somebody wanted it.

The structural consequence is identical either way: the incumbent formation holds the field and forms the next generation. But the mechanism differs, and the corpus should distinguish them, because they behave differently over time. A conqueror who withholds formation deliberately has made a decision he could reverse, and the record shows several who tried to, late and badly. A conqueror whose own framework contains no membership category has nothing to reverse. **Withheld formation and unavailable formation produce the same immediate result and differ entirely in whether the order retains the option** — and an order that never had the option is not merely failing to assimilate. It is structurally incapable of it, and its periphery will remain permanently other no matter how long it holds.

A note on sources. The letter to the exiles is **quoted exactly** from the Authorised Version, Jeremiah 29, verses 5 to 7, which is in the public domain; the question about

singing in a strange land is Psalm 137, likewise quoted exactly from the AV. The Assyrian bride-price letters are summarised from the discussion in this collection's preceding study of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which drew them from the published Neo-Assyrian correspondence; they are given here in paraphrase, with only the quoted royal instruction — *they are to have wives* — reproduced.

The Āl-Yahūdu onomastic data are paraphrased from modern scholarship and not quoted: the figure of roughly a third of the attested population bearing Yahwistic names, the study of two hundred and sixty-five first-generation names showing Iron Age Judahite patterns continuing unchanged, and the observed peak in Yahwistic naming in the period around 552 to 532. The last of these is the module's most load-bearing single datum and deserves a warning: it rests on a corpus that is unprovenanced, incomplete, and unevenly distributed across the decades it covers, so an apparent peak could in principle be an artefact of which tablets happen to survive from which years. It is treated here as a real signal because it is consistent with the other evidence, but a reader should know it is a pattern in a partial archive.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Tero Alstola's book-length study of the Judaean deportees, which is open access and is the best single treatment; Laurie Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch for the publication of the Āl-Yahūdu material; Kathleen Abraham on Hebrew names in the Babylonian record; Ran Zadok on the West Semitic onomasticon; Petra Gesche on the Neo-Babylonian scribal curriculum; Caroline Waerzeggers on Babylonian family names; Paul-Alain Beaulieu on Babylonian naming and the cults. The characterisation of the mirror towns as a labour-development technique that exploited the cooperative advantages of common origin is the mainstream reconstruction and is adopted here rather than invented.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The central claim that Babylon made no attempt to form its deportees is an argument from a broad absence; absences can be filled by future discoveries, though this one is unusually wide and consistent. The onomastic peak is discussed above. The internal complications — mixed naming within single families, variant orthographies used situationally, the possibility that some Yahwistic-named individuals descend from Assyrian-era Israelite deportees rather than from Nebuchadnezzar's — are stated in the text rather than buried, and each of them weakens the picture at the edges without disturbing its shape. The reconstruction of exilic religious development draws on Hebrew texts whose dating is contested in every particular and which were composed by people with a position to defend; the module has therefore used them for what they show about the *problem being addressed* rather than as a chronology of solutions. And the closing contrast between a portable formation and an ambient one is an argument, not a finding: it is offered as a rule the

corpus should test elsewhere, and it will look much weaker if a case turns up in which an ambient formation survived the loss of its carriers intact.

MODULE 5

O Nabu, Stop His Feet

Module 5 · The Cost Column — what compliance was worth and what it cost, run separately for the citizen, the hireling, the oblate, the deportee, the tribesman and the slave; where a man could run to; and the one period in this collection where the ledger can be added up rather than guessed at

A name given to a man who ran

In 520 BC a Babylonian named Nabû-apla-iddin went to court to say that his slave had run away, that he had afterwards seen the man living in the house of one Nabû-uballiṭ, and that Nabû-uballiṭ had given him a new name and then sold him on.

The name the new possessor had given him was *Nabû-šēpīšu-šuzziz*. Nabû, stop his feet.

Consider what has to be true for a man to give another man that name. A slave is a piece of property that walks, and the whole difficulty of owning one is that the property can decide to be somewhere else. The owner cannot watch him every hour, cannot fence a city, and cannot rely on any authority to bring him back at a cost worth paying. So he names him after the problem, and asks a god to do what he cannot: hold the man's feet still. The name is a prayer against exit, worn by the person it is meant to restrain, and heard by him every day.

That name is the right place to start this module, because exit is the variable that governs the whole of it. The question here is not what the great men of Babylonia got — they were priced in an earlier module — but why the ordinary person went along: the free labourer, the temple dependant, the deported farmer, the tribesman, the slave. And the answer for any of them turns on a comparison. What does compliance pay? What does it cost? What does refusal cost? And, decisively, is there anywhere better to go?

Where there is nowhere to go, a state can inflict a great deal and still be obeyed. Where there is somewhere to go, the state must either raise the cost of going or raise the reward for staying, and which of those it chooses is one of the most revealing things about it.

This is also the one module in the ancient part of this collection where the ledger can actually be added up. Babylonia in the sixth century left tens of thousands of

business tablets with prices, wages, rents, interest and the cost of barley running month by month across the whole period. So the arithmetic below is arithmetic, not inference — with the caveat, stated once and holding throughout, that every figure comes from urban archives in five or six cities and that the countryside beyond them is largely dark.

The units, and the floor

Silver was weighed, not coined. The shekel was about 8.3 grams; sixty shekels made a mina. Grain was measured in the *kurru*, roughly 180 litres.

In an ordinary year in this period a shekel of silver bought about one *kurru* of barley — call it 180 litres per shekel, with wide swings in bad years and a long downward drift in price across the dynasty that will matter shortly.

The floor is the important number. Michael Jursa's reconstruction puts bare subsistence for an urban household in the reign of Nabonidus at something like 22 shekels a year, or the barley equivalent of about 22 *kurru* — roughly four thousand litres — with the qualification that most households also had some ground or a few date palms of their own, so this was not the whole of what they lived on. Call the floor, in round terms, **two shekels a month for a household**.

Against that floor, wages. Hired labour in the long sixth century is attested across a wide band — commonly three to ten shekels a month, with the low end nearer one or two for the least-skilled and the least-favoured, and Jursa's median for the reign of Nabonidus at about **two and a half shekels a month**.

So the median hired man, working steadily, cleared his household's subsistence floor by something on the order of a quarter to a third. That is not prosperity. It is a thin, real margin — and it is the first hard fact this module has: **in Babylonia in the sixth century, a free man's labour was worth slightly more than his family's food.**

Two more figures fix the frame. A healthy adult slave's year of work was reckoned, in contract after contract, at twelve *kurru* of barley or twelve shekels of silver, with a day's work valued at a *sūtu*, about six litres — a rate the royal court itself applied when assessing a temple slave handed to a creditor. And the standard rate of interest on a silver loan was twenty per cent.

Put those beside each other and something becomes visible immediately. A slave's year was worth twelve shekels; a free hireling's year at the median was worth thirty. The slave's owner fed, clothed and housed him and the employer of a hireling did not, so the gap is not all profit. But the ratio tells you which way the labour market was pointing, and it was pointing away from bondage.

Why the crown had to pay

Here is where the module's central finding comes from, and it is not a finding about generosity.

The Neo-Babylonian kings inherited an enormous cash windfall — the accumulated treasure of three centuries of Assyrian extraction, taken between 614 and 609 — and then added to it the tribute of the whole Levant, collected under arms every year for four decades. And they had an enormous programme of works to spend it on: temples rebuilt in every ancient city, walls raised at Babylon, canals cut, new land brought under irrigation.

What they did not have was enough people they could simply order to do it. Their own dependants and slaves were nowhere near sufficient for the scale of the building. And the citizens of the great cities held charters of privilege — the protected status this study will examine properly in its own place — which placed them outside conscript labour, a protection the literate class of Babylonia was energetic in reminding kings about, on the ground that the gods punished rulers who imposed service on the citizens of Babylon.

So the crown hired. It paid silver for labour it could not requisition, in quantity, for decades, and the silver went into the hands of working men who then spent it, and other people found things to sell them. Jursa's reconstruction of the sixth-century economy traces the consequence: an increasing monetisation of exchange, a growing importance of free wage labour, free hirelings outnumbering institutional dependants on the building projects, and an urban working class coming into existence. And across the stretch from roughly 610 to 540 the movement in the two series that matter runs the same way — **prices fell and wages rose.**

State the mechanism plainly, because it is the module's most useful sentence and it connects two things usually kept apart. **A liberty won by one class raised the price of labour for another.** The exemption from conscript labour was a privilege of the propertied urban citizenry, bargained for and defended by them, and of no direct benefit whatever to a landless man looking for work. Its structural effect was to force the crown into the labour market with a very large quantity of foreign silver — which raised the wage of exactly the people who held no privilege at all. Nobody designed this. It is the residue of somebody else's bargain, flowing downhill.

The test that has a number

An argument that the common man's position improved is easy to make and hard to check. But there is one measurement that goes straight to the bottom of the distribution, and Babylonia supplies it.

When an arrangement stops delivering at the bottom, free people sell themselves. It is the last transaction available: a man with nothing exchanges his liberty for food, or sells a child to buy grain for the others. The practice is well attested in Mesopotamia across two thousand years — in the Ur III period, at Larsa, among Old Assyrian merchants, and very widely at Nuzi.

Under the Neo-Babylonian empire it essentially disappears. On Muhammad Dandamaev's survey of the whole slavery documentation from Nabopolassar to Alexander, exactly one Neo-Babylonian document of self-sale is known — and it dates to about 648, before this dynasty existed, during Ashurbanipal's siege of Babylon, when the famine in the city was such that a father sold his son and a woman sold herself with the words *lū amatka*, "verily I will be your slave-woman", on the condition that her master feed her. The document even provides for her redemption: when the siege is lifted, any relative near or distant may come to her master and buy her back at her value.

That single text is the baseline. It shows what the bottom of the cost column looks like when the arrangement fails — and it comes from the last years of the order this dynasty replaced.

Across the eighty-seven years that followed, in an archive of tens of thousands of tablets from a society that documented everything and had every reason to write down a transaction of this kind, the practice is not attested again.

Absence of evidence needs handling carefully and this one is handled here rather than hidden: the surviving archives are urban and institutional, the rural poor are largely invisible in them, and a countryside self-sale might never have reached a filed tablet. But the same archives record slave sales, debt, pledges, foreclosures and destitution in abundance. It is not that they decline to record misery. It is that this particular form of it stops appearing.

Offer it, then, as a general instrument and not merely a local observation: **the frequency with which free people sell themselves or their children to eat is the sharpest available measure of whether an order is delivering anything at all to the bottom of it** — a revealed preference registered at the extreme, by the people least able to lie about their position.

Running the columns

That is the aggregate. Now the strata, because Babylonia was not one population and the ledger comes out differently for each.

The free urban citizen had the best of it and knew exactly why. He held a family name, could sit in the assembly that adjudicated disputes, was covered by the city's charter of exemption from conscript labour, and if he was prosperous could discharge his obligation to the crown in silver rather than in person. If he belonged to a priestly family he held prebendary days that paid him a share of a god's table. His cost of compliance was taxes and the tithe; his cost of refusal was the loss of a status that was his entire social existence and could not be reconstructed anywhere else. Exit was theoretically available and practically absurd: everything he was, was registered in one city's ledgers. He complied because the arrangement was manifestly his.

The free hireling — the *agru* — had the thin margin calculated above and, crucially, had bargaining power. One Babylonian letter-writer complains that he has run out of barley, so that if he brings his dependants in they go hungry and run away, and that since it is the month of the date harvest hired men cannot be had for less than six shekels a month. That is a seasonal labour market working exactly as a labour market works, with a man who cannot feed his bound workers discovering that free ones have priced the shortage. Another writer complains of the opposite problem, that he is besieged by men wanting employment and cannot refuse them without the work going undone. His cost of compliance was work; his cost of refusal was hunger; and his exit was to another employer, which is the most ordinary and the most effective exit there is.

The temple oblate — the *širku* — is the most interesting case, and it is a genuinely mixed ledger. He was branded, on the hand, with the star of his goddess, using an iron the temple kept in a storeroom and inventoried alongside its other tools. He could not leave. But he was not a chattel and could not be sold as one; he could marry, hold property, appear in court, run a business, and in some cases rise to manage substantial temple funds. The Eanna's expenditure lists include payments drawn for sick oblates during the periods they could not work — which is, in the plainest terms, sick pay, in the sixth century BC, for a branded man.

And they ran anyway. The temple sent men out to recover them, sometimes; but the reconstruction of the practice from the archives is that recapture generally cost more than it recovered, so that on the whole it was not pursued. That sentence is worth reading twice, because it describes the actual ceiling on what this order could inflict.

The state dependant — the deported *šušānu* at Āl-Yahūdu and its neighbours — held a plot of crown land, a house, a garden and a legal status protecting him from

being sold as a chattel, and owed for it the *ilku*: taxes, work obligations and military service, assessed through his village as a named unit and answering upward to an officer working directly for the governor. The successful among them commuted service into silver, as urban men did. Some did more than that: the Āl-Yahūdu archive shows Judaeans lending silver and barley to their neighbours, managing pledged holdings and collecting the payments due from their own countrymen on the state's behalf.

Run the exit question for him and the answer is stark. Judah was a ruin nine hundred miles away with no city, no temple and no king. There was nowhere to go, and the plot he stood on existed because the crown had made it. His compliance was not purchased and not compelled so much as structurally guaranteed: he had been given the only thing he had by the only party that could take it away. This is the population with the least power in the arrangement and the least reason to want it changed — which the final modules of this study will have to hold up against what happened in 539.

The tribesman of the Chaldean and Aramaean houses had, historically, the best exit in the whole of Mesopotamia: the marsh. For two centuries the reed country at the head of the Gulf had made Babylonia ungovernable for Assyria, because a chief who lost a battle could vanish into water where cavalry and siege engines were useless and come back the following year. The marshes did not go anywhere in the sixth century. But the tribes stop appearing as counterparties under the dynasty that had probably come out of them; their territories persist as districts with officials attached, and their chiefs stop negotiating. The most plausible reading is not that the exit closed but that the reason to use it did — a house whose kinsman held Babylon had a better return from the arrangement than from the reeds. Where a group's exit is unchanged and its use of exit stops, look at what it is being paid.

The slave had the worst ledger and the record shows him testing it constantly. His year of labour was reckoned at twelve shekels, and he was fed. He could hold property and trade — the great family archives are full of slaves conducting business — and he could sometimes be redeemed. Against that: he could be pledged for a loan, given as a dowry, divided among heirs, branded, put in irons, and imprisoned for attempting to leave or for refusing to work.

And the flight was frequent enough to be priced. Sale contracts carry a warranty clause, *pūt lā ḫalāqi*, in which the seller guarantees that the slave will not run away within a hundred days of sale, and undertakes to recover him or replace him or refund the price if he does. A hundred days of guaranteed presence, written into the standard terms of sale, is a market's estimate of the probability of exit, and it exists because

buyers demanded it. There was a reward of two shekels for returning a fugitive — about a month's median wage.

One man's file can be reassembled across several documents. Bariki-ili passed through the hands of a series of owners, was pledged for a loan of twenty shekels, was given away to a daughter and passed on again, and ended in the possession of the head of the Egibi family. At a trial at Babylon in 548 he admitted that he had run twice and that he had stayed hidden for a long time; and that on the second attempt, having learned from the failure of the first, he had passed himself off as an official in the service of a named gentleman.

He was recaptured, and the record does not say what happened to him.

What the enforcement side could actually do

The last column is the state's, and the archives permit an unusually clear view of it.

The temples ran courts. Cases were heard by the royal resident and the temple administrator sitting with judges, and an assembly of citizens participated in the adjudication; matters could progress from the temple's own authority to royal judges and, in serious cases, to the king's court. The penalties were financial and could be severe — an Egyptian oblate at Uruk convicted under Nabonidus of fishing and cutting timber on the temple's land was ordered to pay thirtyfold, a penalty matching the tariff in Hammurabi's laws a thousand years earlier. Under the same king a criminal gang operating at Uruk was investigated by temple officials acting on a royal writ, which shows the machinery working from the palace down. Debtors who could not pay handed over slave women in lieu; in one case the wife of an oblate was required to deliver up her two sons to the temple authorities, with no reason recorded.

So there was a real apparatus, it reached down to individuals, it could ruin a man financially, and it could take his children.

But note what it is not. There is no evidence of a Babylonian secret police, no network of informers reporting on the population's opinions, no campaign of exemplary public terror against the ruled, and nothing resembling the systematic display violence the Assyrian kings put in their palace reliefs. The enforcement in these archives is *litigious* — it sues, fines, distrains, and occasionally imprisons — and it operates through institutions in which the people it acts on also sit as witnesses and adjudicators. And at the point where enforcement would have cost more than it recovered, as with the runaway oblates, it simply stopped.

Which gives the module its last structural point. **A state that will not spend more on catching you than you are worth has set a ceiling on how expensive it can make your non-compliance.** And a state that cannot make non-compliance expensive must

make compliance rewarding, or lose the labour. Babylonia, holding an enormous pile of Assyrian and Syrian silver and unable either to conscript its citizens or economically to chase its runaways, did the latter — not from principle, and not from kindness, but because it was the only column left.

Reading the cost column against the framework

First: a liberty won by one stratum can raise the price of labour for another, and the corpus should look for this everywhere. The card treats liberties as residue from factional fights inside the hierarchy — concessions extracted by parties with standing and means, which accrete and later benefit people who had no part in winning them. Babylonia shows the mechanism operating through a channel the card has not named: not through law extending downward, but through the **labour market**.

The exemption from conscript labour belonged to the urban propertied citizenry. It conferred nothing on a landless hireling. But it obliged a crown holding three centuries of looted Assyrian silver and an enormous building programme to buy labour it would otherwise have commanded — and the resulting bidding raised wages, deepened monetisation, and brought an urban working class into existence. The beneficiaries were people the privilege excluded. Add to the card: **when a protected class is exempted from compulsory service in an order with money and work to do, the exemption becomes a wage subsidy for the unprotected** — and this is one of the few routes by which a benefit reaches the bottom of a hierarchy without anyone at the top intending it to.

Second: exit sets the ceiling on cost, and the ceiling is economic rather than moral. The card holds that where the ruled can leave, the ruler's threats are discounted. Babylonia sharpens the mechanism by showing where the discount actually comes from. The temple did not stop chasing runaway oblates because it had scruples. It stopped because pursuit cost more than the man was worth. The relevant quantity is not whether exit is *possible* but whether **re-capture is economic**, and that is a calculation the ruler runs, in silver, against the value of the person.

This yields something the corpus can measure. Where a market prices flight — a hundred-day warranty against a slave running, a two-shekel bounty for his return — the price *is* the ruler's own estimate of exit's probability and of what suppressing it is worth. **Look for the warranty clause and the bounty. They are the enforcement side's published assessment of its own reach**, and they will often contradict what the same order's monuments claim about its power.

Third: the disappearance of self-sale as a diagnostic for the bottom of the column. Offered as a general instrument for the collection. In any pre-modern order that leaves transactional documents, the rate at which free persons sell themselves or their children in order to eat is the most direct measurement available of whether the arrangement delivers anything to the people at the bottom — because it is a choice made under maximum duress by those least able to misrepresent their position. Babylonia gives one attested instance in eighty-seven years, and it belongs to the siege that ended the previous order. The corpus should run the same count wherever the documents allow, and should treat a rising count as the earliest hard signal that an order has stopped paying.

Fourth, and stated as a correction to this study's own expectations. A conquest empire in this collection is normally found holding its subject populations at or below subsistence, transferring the surplus outward, and making up the difference in fear. That is not what the Babylonian numbers show. Across the dynasty, in the documented urban core, prices fell, wages rose, free hired labour expanded at the expense of compulsory service, and the transaction of last resort disappeared.

The reason is not benevolence and the module has been careful not to imply one. It is that this empire's plunder arrived as **silver rather than as land**, that the class best placed to take it had already exempted itself from providing labour, and that the crown therefore had to convert its windfall into wages to get anything built. An empire that loots portable wealth and cannot conscript its own citizens will end up distributing part of the loot downward through a labour market, whatever it intends.

Which sets up the question the rest of this study has to answer, and it should be stated now rather than sprung later. If the common man of Babylonia was doing better under this dynasty than under the last one — measurably, in wages and prices and in the vanishing of self-sale — then whatever went wrong in 539 did not go wrong at the bottom.

A note on sources. No public-domain primary text is quoted in this module; the evidence is almost entirely economic and administrative tablets whose editions are modern. Three short Akkadian expressions are given directly because the words themselves are ancient: *lū amatka*, the self-sale formula from the text of about 648; *pūt lā ḫalāqi*, the warranty against flight in slave sales; and *Nabû-šēpīšu-šuzziz*, the name given to a recaptured runaway, whose English gloss follows Dandamaev.

The quantitative framework is paraphrased from Michael Jursa's *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC* and his subsequent work on labour: the subsistence estimate of about 22 shekels a year for an urban household under Nabonidus, the median monthly wage of about 2.5 shekels for the same reign,

the attested wage band of roughly three to ten shekels a month for hired labour, the fall in prices and rise in wages between about 610 and 540, the predominance of free hirelings over institutional dependants on building projects, and the reconstruction of why the crown hired rather than conscripted. The valuation of a healthy adult slave's year of labour at twelve *kurru* or twelve shekels, the day-rate of one *sūtu*, the hundred-day flight warranty, the two-shekel recapture bounty, the file of Bariki-ili, the renamed runaway, and the survey establishing that self-sale is attested only once in the Neo-Babylonian material are all paraphrased from Dandamaev's *Slavery in Babylonia*. The temple court material — the thirtyfold penalty against the Egyptian oblate, the royal writ behind the Uruk criminal investigation, the composition of the adjudicating assembly — is paraphrased from the published trial records and from Małgorzata Sandowicz's work on Neo-Babylonian dispute documents and on the Uruk investigation; the sick-pay entries and the assessment that recapturing runaway oblates was generally uneconomic are from recent work on the Eanna archive. Kristin Kleber on temple dependants and Heather Baker on private slavery inform the sections on those strata.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. Every figure comes from urban institutional and family archives in five or six cities; the rural population outside them is almost invisible, and a module that calculates a national cost column from such a sample is calculating from the best-documented and probably the best-off part of the country. The disappearance of self-sale is an argument from absence and is qualified in the text at the point of use. The subsistence figure is a modern estimate built on assumptions about household size and non-wage income, not a Babylonian statement, and the ratio of wage to subsistence that this module derives from it inherits all of that uncertainty; it should be read as an order of magnitude and not as a standard of living. Wage figures vary by season, skill and institution across a wide band, and the median quoted is a scholarly construction from a scattered series. The claim that the tribes' exit remained open while their use of it ceased is an inference from silence in the record, and silence about tribes in an urban archive is exactly what one would expect for other reasons. And the closing proposition — that whatever failed in 539 did not fail at the bottom — is a hypothesis this module has set up and later modules must test, not a conclusion it has established.

MODULE 6

The Tithe Which the King Gave

Module 6 · Extraction — where the money came from, in what order, and what happened when the first two sources ran out; the year the richest temple in the south sold its gold and could not pay its priests; and why the last king of Babylon spent a decade in a desert

A receipt from the accession year

In the summer of 556 BC a new king came to the throne of Babylon by a coup, and one of the first things he did was recorded on a tablet in the archive of the temple of the sun god at Sippar. Raymond Dougherty printed it in 1929:

> *"Six minae of gold, the tithe which the king gave in the great gate of the temple Ebabbara. The 26th day of Sivan, the accession year of Nabonidus, the king of Babylon."*

Six minae is three hundred and sixty shekels — about three kilograms of gold — handed over at the temple's main gate within weeks of the seizure of power, and filed.

Now set beside it a receipt of a different kind, from eighteen years earlier, published by A. H. Sayce in 1891:

> *"25 shekels of silver, the tithe of Merodach-nadin-akhi, the son of the king, by the hands of Šamaš-yukin-akhi and Aqabi-ili, he has given to Bit-Uri, the 14th day of Iyyar, the 42d year of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon."*

A king pays a tithe. A king's son pays a tithe, through named agents, and the temple issues a receipt.

The word for it is *ešrû*, the tenth, cognate with the Hebrew *maʿaser*, and in Babylonia it was owed to the gods by everyone who had income from land, herds or trade — including the royal family. There were tithe-lands and tithe-collectors and running arrears; the documents record men owing the balance of the tithe of years three and four and undertaking to deliver half the barley and half the dates into the temple.

Start here because these two receipts state the module's problem. The obvious model of an empire's revenue is a single arrow: wealth flows from the periphery and from the poor toward a palace at the centre. In Babylonia the arrows ran in several directions at once, the largest of them ran *into* the temples rather than out of them, and

the question that organises this module is what happened to the direction of flow over eighty-seven years — because it reversed, and the reversal can be dated.

Phase one: the road

For the first two generations this empire did not have a revenue problem, because it had a windfall.

Between 614 and 609 the Babylonians and their Median allies took Assur, Nineveh and Harran, and the chronicle's account of Nineveh says that the spoil of the city was a quantity beyond counting. What was carried off was the accumulated treasure of three centuries of the most systematic extraction machine the world had yet built — the tribute of Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, Anatolia, Elam and Egypt, concentrated in three cities and taken in a single campaign season.

Then the annual circuit. From 605 onward, for four decades, a Babylonian army went west every year, moved through the Levant, and came home with what the chronicle calls the heavy tribute of the land of Hatti. This was not a provincial revenue system. Babylon did not do to the southern Levant what Assyria had done — carve it into provinces with resident governors, fixed assessments, roads, garrisons and an annual paper cycle. It left client kings in place and collected in person, under arms, once a year.

That choice is worth pausing on, because it is a real fiscal decision with a real trade-off, and it fits everything this study has found about this empire's inherited limits. A provincial system is enormously expensive to build and comparatively cheap to run: once the governors and the registers exist, the revenue arrives whether or not the army does. A circuit is cheap to set up and expensive to run for ever, because the revenue arrives only if the army does, and the army must be raised, equipped, provisioned and marched a thousand miles each year to collect it. Babylon took the cheap-to-start option, and then paid the running cost for as long as the dynasty lasted.

And there is the further consequence this study has already met from the military side: a tribute that must be re-demonstrated annually is repriced annually. Judah stopped paying within months of the one occasion on which the Babylonian army was visibly checked. A provincial assessment does not do that.

Phase one and a half: what the king had bought with it

Where did the windfall go? Into the temples, at a scale that has always been read as piety and should be read as accounting.

Forty-three years of rebuilding: Esagila and Etemenanki at Babylon, Ezida and its ziggurat at Borsippa, the shrines of every ancient city restored and re-endowed and re-provisioned. New canals cut and new land opened. The endowments grew, and with them the value of every prebendary day held by every member of the family-name class. That was the settlement, and it was paid for with Assyrian and Syrian silver.

So through the first half of the dynasty the crown was a net *payer* into the institutions that mattered. Nabonidus's six minae of gold at the Ebabbar gate, handed over within weeks of a coup, is the same manoeuvre performed in miniature and in a hurry by a man who needed the Sippar establishment on his side by the end of the month.

Phase two: the domestic base

Underneath the windfall there was always an ordinary revenue system, and it is worth setting out because it is the machinery that had to carry the load when the windfall stopped.

The *ilku* was the obligation attached to land: taxes, work duties and the production of an equipped soldier, assessed on the holding. Urban and prosperous men commuted it into silver rather than performing it in person, which is a fact about both convenience and inequality. The tithe ran on income from land and herds. There were rents on temple and crown land, and interest on the credit that financed both. There were transaction taxes with an apparatus to enforce them: a royal tax office and a royal register, and sale contracts obliging the seller to *pass the slave through the royal register* before delivering him — the verb is the one used for clearing goods through customs. There were tolls on canals and crossings, and the caravan merchant paid his tenth to the temple on his return.

Two features of this system matter more than its rates.

The first is that the crown had no revenue service of its own worth the name. It had the temples. Every major sanctuary carried a royal resident at the head of its administration, and the crown's demands arrived as orders to that board: raise these troops, equip them, feed them for the season, send this workforce west, find the silver to pay hired men at Tyre. The Eanna of Uruk maintained a labour force on the Phoenician coast and sent silver after it. The state's reach into the country ran through institutions the king could command and did not own — which was cheap, and which had a consequence that this module is about to reach.

The second is that the same body was on both sides of the ledger. The temples were the beneficiaries of the settlement and the instrument of extraction. In an order where the taxman is a royal official and the priesthood is a separate estate, an increase in

taxation and a quarrel with the church are two different events. Here they were one event.

The year the gold went out

Which brings the module to its hinge, and to a document that has not been famous and ought to be.

Among the Eanna material at Yale is a collection of thirty-odd administrative records gathered onto a single tablet, dated to the fourteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar — 591/590 BC. Elizabeth Payne and Michael Jursa's study of it reconstructs what the compilation was for. The first columns concern gold; the remainder are largely prebendary payments. And what the assemblage records is a temple in financial crisis: the Eanna selling off its assets, and having difficulty paying its priests.

The cause, on their reading, was royal demand — the crown requiring money and manpower from the temple in support of the king's building and military undertakings.

Sit with the date. This is not the twilight of the dynasty. It is the fourteenth year of the greatest reign in it, four years before the second fall of Jerusalem, in the middle of the annual circuit, at the height of the empire's power and of its building programme. And in that year the richest temple in southern Mesopotamia was liquidating gold to meet the crown's requisitions and falling behind on the payments due to the men who held its prebends.

That is the crossover, or at least the earliest instance of it we can date. Somewhere in the first half of Nebuchadnezzar's reign the relationship between the crown and the temples stopped being one in which the crown poured in and became one in which the crown drew out — and it happened while the pouring-in was still going on, so that the same institution was receiving grand new buildings from the king and selling its gold to pay for his projects in the same decade.

Note also who felt it. The temple did not fail to feed its oblates; it failed to pay its *prebendaries* — the family-name class, the men whose seven and a half days were the whole basis of their standing, whose consent this dynasty had bought and could not replace, and whose priesthood administered the ceremony that made a king. The extraction landed exactly there.

Eating the institution from the inside

After that the direction of travel is consistent, and it can be followed in the technical vocabulary of the archives, which is where administrative history usually hides.

There was a payment at the Eanna called the *upnu*, which had begun life as a fee levied by the temple's own scribe on the temple's own internal transactions — an in-house charge, of no interest to anyone outside. By the reign of Nabonidus at the latest, and possibly already under Nebuchadnezzar, it had been converted into a tax payable to the crown. Jursa and Yuval Levavi, who traced its evolution from the ninth century to the sixth, describe it as one more aspect of a drawn-out process by which the Eanna was brought under ever tighter royal control across the sixth century.

That is the mechanism in miniature and it is worth naming for what it is. The crown did not confiscate the temple's endowment; that would have been visible, contestable and catastrophic. It reached into the temple's internal accounting and redirected an existing revenue line, one at a time, so that money which had circulated inside the institution began arriving outside it. From the middle of the sixth century, state taxes on temple income were being collected by an official attached to the Esagila at Babylon — which is to say the crown had built a central collection point for temple revenue and housed it inside the greatest temple of all.

And under Nabonidus the pressure took a further form. The temples increasingly farmed out their income — the collection of rents and dues on land and date gardens contracted to entrepreneurs who paid a fixed sum and took the risk and the margin. Rent farming raises the yield and lowers the administrative burden, and it does one other thing: it lets men into the revenue stream who have no place in the old order. At Uruk the rent farmer Šumu-ukīn of the Basia family rose to prominence at the beginning of Nabonidus's reign as an outsider to the local urban elite.

An outsider, brought in over the heads of the incumbents, to extract more efficiently from an institution that was already being drained, by a king who had taken the throne in a coup and would shortly leave the country for a decade. That is not a religious controversy. It is a fiscal administration under strain, and every one of its moves was felt by the same people.

The stream that stopped

Why was the crown under strain at all? Because the external revenue had a ceiling, and the ceiling was the one this study identified from the military side.

The plunder of Assyria was a single event. The tribute of the Levant was recurring but bounded — bounded by the size of the region, by the annual cost of going to get it, and above all by the fact that the empire never expanded again after 605. Two attempts to extend the revenue base failed outright. Egypt was invaded once, in 601, and the army came home mauled and spent the following year rebuilding its chariot arm. Tyre was blockaded for thirteen years and did not fall, and a deportee prophet writing in

Babylonia around 571 recorded the fiscal result with a clarity no Babylonian document matches: the army's heads went bald and its shoulders were rubbed raw, and neither the king nor his army got any wages out of it.

So: one-time plunder, exhausted; a tribute circuit at capacity; two failed attempts to open new ground. From roughly 570 the external stream was flat, the building programme was not, and the difference had to come from Babylonia.

Which is the frame in which the last king's famous eccentricity should be examined.

A decade in a desert

In 553, in his third year, Nabonidus went west and then south, and did not come back for about a decade. He took Edom, and then the north Arabian oases — Taymāʾ, Dadān, Fadak, Ḫaybar, Yadīʿ and Yaṯrib — and established himself at Taymāʾ, from which he controlled the caravan tracks running up from South Arabia toward the Levant and Mesopotamia. His son held Babylon in his absence. The chronicle records, year after year, that the king did not come to Babylon in Nisannu and the New Year festival was not held.

The received explanation is religious: a king obsessed with the moon god, alienated from Marduk's city, retreating to a lunar cult centre. This study is required to test the unglamorous reading first, and the unglamorous reading is strong.

Taymāʾ was the junction of the incense and gold routes out of southern Arabia. The Assyrians had gone after the same traffic before him. Donald Wiseman's objection to the religious explanation is the one that has never been satisfactorily answered: no source mentions the presence or the construction of a Babylonian temple at Taymāʾ, or a temple of Sîn there. Israel Ephʿal reads the operation as imperial expansion — a fortified garrison and an administrative outpost, with camel caravans running supplies from Babylon. And a raid does not require a decade; an occupation does.

Set that against the fiscal position. An empire whose plunder is spent, whose tribute circuit is at capacity, whose two attempts at new conquest have failed, and whose temples are being drained to the point of not paying their own priests, sends its king in person to seize the only major revenue artery within reach that it does not already control. That is not eccentricity. That is a man doing the thing his position required and being unable to do it from home.

What it cost him was the ceremony. And what that cost, this study will come to.

None of which requires denying that Nabonidus was devoted to Sîn — he plainly was, and said so at length. Both can be true, and the honest formulation is that the religious explanation tells us what he said about it and the fiscal one tells us what his position demanded. Where the two are available, the corpus takes the position first.

The other ledger

One last item, because extraction has a face that is not silver.

Among the ration tablets excavated at Babylon from the vaulted rooms near the Ishtar Gate are entries recording oil issued to captives and craftsmen living in and around the city, and among the recipients is Ya'ukīnu, king of the land of Yahudu — Jehoiachin of Judah, deported in 597 — together with his five sons, drawn from the royal storehouse.

That is what a conquered dynasty looked like on the books of the conqueror: a line item in a provisions list. It cost the Babylonian crown a little oil to keep a deposed king alive in the capital, and it bought a permanent hostage against the loyalty of a province, a replacement candidate should the installed king rebel, and a demonstration to every other client ruler of what surrender purchased. It is one of the cheapest instruments in this entire study, and it was still on the books thirty-five years later.

Reading extraction against the framework

First, and the addition: the direction of flow between a ruler and the institution that holds his warrant can reverse, and the reversal is the datable beginning of the fracture.

The card treats extraction and settlement as separate questions — what is taken, and who was bought. Babylonia shows them as one question examined at two dates. In the first phase the crown poured the plunder of two empires into the temples, enriching the family-name class without granting it anything. In the second phase it drew the same institutions down: requisitioning money and manpower until, in a year we can name, the Eanna sold gold and failed to pay its prebendaries. In the third it went into their internal accounts and converted their own revenue lines into royal taxes, installed a collection office inside the greatest temple in the country, and let outsiders into the revenue stream as rent farmers.

From the outside all three phases look like the same relationship — a pious king, a great temple, a royal resident at the board. What changed was the sign. **The corpus should date the crossover in any order where the ruler's warrant is held by an institution he also taxes, because the crossover is the moment the settlement's consideration silently converts from gift to levy** — and the party being billed is the party whose consent the whole arrangement runs on. In an order where the taxman and the anchor-holder are different people, a fiscal squeeze and a legitimacy crisis are separate problems that may or may not coincide. Where they are the same people, a fiscal squeeze *is* a legitimacy crisis, with a lag.

Second: an empire that stops expanding converts its domestic institutions into revenue, and that conversion is visible long before any military weakness is.

This is offered as a leading indicator the collection can use. Babylon's reach was fixed in 605 and its external revenue was capped by around 570. Nothing military went wrong for another thirty years; the army was intact in 539 and the walls were the strongest in the world. But the fiscal record shows the adjustment beginning almost at once — temple requisitions by 591, tax conversions across the following decades, rent farming and outsider entrepreneurs under Nabonidus, and finally a king personally occupying a desert oasis for ten years to capture a trade route.

A windfall empire has a fiscal half-life, and the search for replacement revenue is the observable symptom. Look for it in the tax vocabulary rather than in the annals: the appearance of new levies, the conversion of existing institutional fees into state ones, the farming-out of collection, and the promotion of men from outside the incumbent elite to do the collecting. Each of those is a small administrative event. Together they are an order eating its own foundations, and they precede the visible crisis by decades.

Third, a compounding of the two earlier structural findings rather than a new one. This study has established that the Babylonian floor of force was equipped by the temples, and that the Babylonian warrant was conferred by the temples. Extraction now adds the third: the Babylonian revenue system *was* the temples. Army, legitimacy and money all ran through one set of institutions, and that set of institutions was the one body in the country the crown had not created, could not replace, and had spent eighty-seven years making richer and then draining.

The corpus has a general rule that a ruler should not let one party hold two of the three. Babylon let one party hold all three. Whether that is the explanation for 539 is a question for the modules that follow, and this study is obliged to consider that it may not be — the walls, after all, did not fall, and the archives did not stop.

A note on sources. The two tithe receipts are **quoted exactly** from public-domain publications: the Nabonidus accession tithe of six minae of gold from Raymond Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* (New Haven, 1929), and the tithe of Nebuchadnezzar's son from A. H. Sayce's *Records of the Past* (London, 1891). Both are nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century renderings and their orthography of names is of their period; neither has been collated against the tablets. The chronicle's description of the spoil of Nineveh is quoted from C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh* (1923), public domain. The Ezekiel passage on the Tyre siege was quoted in full in an earlier module and is only summarised here. The Jehoiachin ration entries are described rather than quoted.

The remaining evidence is modern scholarship, paraphrased and credited. The Eanna financial crisis of 591/590 and its attribution to royal demands for money and manpower is Elizabeth Payne and Michael Jursa's reading of YOS 17 360 and related texts; the account of the *upnu*'s conversion from an internal temple scribe's fee into a crown tax, and the framing of it as part of a long process of tightening royal control over the Eanna, is Jursa and Yuval Levavi's. The wider fiscal reconstruction — the *ilku* and its commutation into silver, the tithe, the royal tax office and register, rent farming, and the collection of state taxes on temple income by an official attached to the Esagila from the mid-sixth century — draws on Jursa's work on taxation and fiscal administration in Babylonia and on Kristin Kleber's on the relations between the crown and the Eanna. The identification of Šumu-ukīn of the Basia family as an outsider rent farmer rising under Nabonidus is from the recent work on Babylonian names and social structure. On the Arabian expedition: the reconstruction of the occupied oases and their position on the caravan routes follows the recent literature on Nabonidus's Arabian campaigns; the objection that no source records a temple of Sîn at Taymāʾ is Donald Wiseman's; the reading of the venture as imperial and commercial expansion with a garrison and administrative outpost is Israel Ephʿal's.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The crossover from crown-as-payer to crown-as-extractor is dated here from a single documented crisis at one temple in one year; it is the earliest clear instance available, not necessarily the first occurrence, and a fuller series might move the date in either direction. The claim that external revenue was flat from around 570 is an inference from the absence of new conquests and the failure at Tyre and Egypt, not from any revenue series, because no such series exists. The fiscal reading of the Arabian decade is a reading: it is better supported than the religious one and is the one this study adopts, but Nabonidus's own inscriptions give religious reasons at length and this module has not disproved them, only declined to put them first. The characterisation of Babylonian revenue in the Levant as a circuit rather than a provincial system is broadly right but too flat — there was some provincial organisation in the north-west, around Carchemish and Hamath, and the module's contrast with Assyria is sharper than the evidence quite supports. And the closing observation that one body held the army, the warrant and the revenue is a structural statement assembled across three modules from three different bodies of evidence; it is this study's central proposition and it has not yet been tested against what actually happened in 539.

MODULE 7

This Is Not a Lie, It Is the Truth

Module 7 · Information & Suppression — a forged charter seventeen centuries old, manufactured by priests and shown to a king; the empire that fought four wars and wrote about bricks; the six-hundred-year observation programme that belonged to a temple; and why our whole picture of this order is the shape of the material it was written on

The monument that insists

In 1881 Hormuzd Rassam, digging at Sippar for the British Museum, brought up a stone object of a shape nobody had seen before: a squat cross in plan, about fifty-seven centimetres high, with twelve inscribed faces carrying three hundred and forty-six lines of cuneiform in an archaic script.

The text announces itself as the record of a king of Akkad — Manishtushu, son of Sargon, who reigned in the twenty-third century BC — setting out what he had given to the temple of the sun god at Sippar. It details the refurbishment of the Ebabbar, the gold and silver and cult objects provided, and the estates and revenues assigned. And at one point it makes a grant of a very particular kind: thirty-eight townships released to Shamash, of whose labour the king says he did not take advantage, and whom he did not call up for service, so that they should labour for the Ebabbar alone.

The document ends by anticipating a question. In the published translation the line reads: *this is not a lie, it is the truth.* Then curses on anyone who damages the monument — that Enki fill his canals with silt, that Ninhursaga stop childbirth in his land, that Adad smash his plans.

It is a forgery. The script is archaising rather than archaic; the Akkadian contains words unattested for a thousand years after Manishtushu; the measures of capacity are wrong for the period. And the demonstration is conclusive rather than merely suggestive, because a second copy of the same text was found nearby in ordinary, correct Neo-Babylonian — and the supposedly ancient version reproduces the *word order and vocabulary of the later one*, even where doing so violates the conventions of Old Akkadian. The archaic monument is a translation of the modern text, not the other way round.

The dating has moved later over the last century. It was first taken for a genuine Akkadian monument, then for an Old Babylonian copy, then for an Old Babylonian forgery. Current scholarship places its manufacture in the Neo-Babylonian period —

one line of argument putting it early in the reign of Nabonidus, assembled as a pastiche by senior ecclesiastical officials at Sippar in order to secure the king's support for the Ebabbar.

Everything in this module follows from taking that object seriously, and the first thing to notice about it is the direction it faces.

Whose deception, aimed at whom

The standard shape of an information problem in this collection is a ruler managing what the ruled are allowed to know: an annal in which the king never loses, a monument facing outward, a channel of trusted report pointed at the throne. Babylonia's best-documented act of deliberate fabrication is none of those things. It was made by the interpretive class, and it was aimed at the king.

Consider what it was for. The operative clause is an exemption: these townships owe no labour service to the crown and work for the temple alone, and a king of enormous antiquity said so. That is precisely the privilege — freedom from conscript labour for the temple's people and estates — which this study has already found to be the load-bearing element of the Babylonian settlement, and which was under fiscal pressure in exactly the decades in question. The Eanna at Uruk had been selling gold and failing to pay its prebendaries under royal requisition as early as 591; internal temple revenue lines were being converted into crown taxes; rent-farming and outside entrepreneurs were being pushed into the temples' accounts.

Under that pressure, the Ebabbar produced a seventeen-hundred-year-old royal charter confirming its exemptions, in stone, in what looked like the handwriting of the age of Sargon.

There is no need to imagine cynics. The men who made it may well have believed the exemptions were ancient, and may have thought they were reconstructing a lost document rather than inventing one — the Babylonian scribal profession had built up an entire technical apparatus for rendering texts into archaic script and style, and a scholar who possessed that apparatus and believed his temple's privileges were immemorial could produce this object with a clear conscience. What the corpus asks is not what they felt but what the position required. Their position required an unimpeachable warrant for a privilege that a king was eroding, and the only warrant a king cannot outrank is one older than kingship as he understands it.

Which is the mechanism worth naming. **Antiquity is the one claim a ruler cannot audit and cannot outbid.** He can raise a tax, appoint a resident, promote an outsider and confirm or refuse a priest. He cannot go back to the twenty-third century. A

document that is older than the dynasty defeats the dynasty by construction — and the temptation to supply one, where the technical means exist, is very nearly irresistible.

This study's information asymmetry, then, is not the usual one. It runs between a king and his own priesthood, and the priesthood is the party with the better forgery.

The empire that wrote about bricks

Now the silence, which is the fact about this order that everyone notices and almost everyone misreads.

Nebuchadnezzar II ruled forty-three years. He destroyed the Egyptian army at Carchemish, took Jerusalem twice, blockaded Tyre for thirteen years, campaigned into Arabia, and fought a battle in Egypt. His inscriptional corpus is enormous. In the whole of it he never names an enemy, never names a battle, and never describes a campaign. Gadd put it in 1923 in a phrase this study has quoted before: the inscriptions, copious as they are, record nothing but building operations, abstaining with an almost sedulous perversity from any but the vaguest reference to contemporary affairs.

The temptation is to read that as suppression — an empire concealing its wars, or ashamed of them. The position logic points somewhere much less dramatic and much more useful.

A royal inscription is not a history. It is a **performance report submitted to a principal**, and its subject matter tells you what the ruler was being assessed on. The Assyrian annal is addressed to Assur and to posterity, and its content is conquest, because an Assyrian king's stewardship was measured by whether he had extended the god's domain: he reports campaigns because campaigns are the metric. The Neo-Babylonian building inscription is addressed to Marduk and to the future king who will dig down to the foundation and find it, and its content is provisioning, because a Babylonian king's stewardship was measured by whether he had kept the great temples supplied. He reports bricks because bricks are the metric.

That is exactly the titulary this study found in Module 3: the caretaker of Esagila and Ezida, the tireless official, meek and humble. A man whose published job description is quartermaster has no more reason to write about Carchemish than a modern chief executive has to put his golf handicap in the annual report. It is not that the war was secret. It is that the war was not what he was being scored on.

Before reading a silence as concealment, establish what the document was scored on. Most imperial silences are indifference rather than suppression, and mistaking the one for the other manufactures a conspiracy where there is only a job description.

But the corollary is real and should not be softened. This empire produced *no public account of itself at all*. Assyria's annals and palace reliefs faced outward as well as upward — they were read to visitors, shown to envoys, and their imagery of siege and impalement was doing work on an audience of the living. Babylon produced nothing of the kind. Its royal statements were buried in walls. Its chronicles were filed. Its subject peoples were told nothing, because, as Module 3 found, their belief was not part of what held the arrangement up. An order that runs no persuasion toward the governed has no channel to reach them through when it needs one — and in 539 a rival arrived who had built exactly that channel.

The record that rotted

Before going further there is a methodological problem to put on the table, because it qualifies every module in this study and it has a specific cause.

Where is the Babylonian state's paperwork? An empire of this size, running an annual thousand-mile military circuit, provincial governors, tax offices, registers and a court that heard appeals, must have generated correspondence in volume. Almost none survives. Royal letters from this period are so rare that a single example — Nabonidus writing to the citizens of Uruk — is a showpiece.

Michael Jursa's reconstruction supplies the answer, and it is not that the letters were destroyed. It is that they were written on the wrong thing. The Babylonian state's administration increasingly ran in Aramaic, and Aramaic was written in ink on papyrus and leather. The temples went on writing Akkadian in cuneiform on clay. Clay survives burial for two and a half thousand years; papyrus in the Mesopotamian water table survives nothing. The evidence that the royal correspondence existed is indirect and abundant: the temple letters that do survive refer constantly to royal instructions, royal officials and royal decisions arriving from outside.

So the archive we have is not a sample of what Babylonia wrote. It is a sample of what Babylonia wrote **on clay** — and the choice of clay tracked the institution. The temples are loud in the record because temples were conservative about writing material. The palace is silent because the palace had modernised.

Every finding in this study that rests on the prominence of the temples has to be discounted by that, and this module says so plainly rather than leaving it to the source note. The picture of an order in which the temples equipped the army, held the warrant and collected the revenue is built substantially from temple archives, and the counterweight — whatever the palace thought it was doing — has dissolved. The findings are not thereby wrong; the temple documents record the crown giving orders

and the temples obeying, which is not something a temple archive would invent. But the proportions are unrecoverable.

What Babylonia did record

And yet to call this a silent civilisation would be exactly backwards, because it produced the longest sustained observational programme in the history of the world.

From at least 652 BC — the date of the earliest surviving tablet, though the practice is generally traced back to the reign of Nabonassar in the eighth century — until 61 BC, observers in Babylon kept what they called, in their own title for the texts, *the regular watching*. Every night the sky was observed and written down. Short records covering days or a month were compiled into longer tablets covering half a year, more carefully written, in smaller script.

The content was not only astronomical. Each month's section runs in a fixed order: the positions and phases of the moon and planets, eclipses, solstices and equinoxes; then the weather; then the level of the Euphrates; then the market prices of six commodities — barley, dates, cuscuta, cress, sesame and wool; then the notable events of the month.

Six hundred years. Sky, rainfall, river level, six price series and the political news, in a standard format, night after night, generation after generation. The observations are good enough that when modern values are derived from them the synodic month comes out correct to within a few parts in ten million. Over a thousand fragments survive.

And the programme belonged to the temple. The diaries were compiled by families of astronomer-astrologers working under the sponsorship of the assembly of the Esagila — the same body, in the same building, that administered the ceremony by which a man became king of Babylon.

Set beside it the other Babylonian genre this study has relied on throughout: the chronicle series. Dated, terse, without adjectives, recording the fall of Nineveh, a mutual mauling in Egypt, a rebellion in which the king killed his own soldiers, and the year-after-year failure of the New Year festival, all in the same flat register. Written by scribes, kept for the file, copied for centuries.

Neither the diaries nor the chronicles were commissioned by a king or written to make anyone look good. Both were institutional records maintained by the priesthood of Babylon. Which means that the finding of the previous modules now takes its final form: **the temples of Babylonia equipped the army, conferred the warrant, collected the revenue, and kept the country's records.** Four of four.

Suppression, and how little of it there is

An honest module has to report that the suppression side of this ledger is nearly empty, and to say so without pretending the emptiness is proof of anything.

There is no Neo-Babylonian secret police in the record. There are no informers reporting on opinion. There is no campaign of exemplary terror against subjects, no destruction of hostile texts, no execution for speech, and — strikingly, given how much survives — no evidence that anybody was punished for saying the wrong thing about the king. The Assyrian palace reliefs with their flayings and their heaps of heads have no Babylonian counterpart.

What there is, is personnel. A great family called the Nūr-Sîns was removed from its position, in a case Jursa and Shai Gordin have reconstructed as evidence of the dynasty consolidating its state. Nabonidus, returning from Arabia, relieved his son of command along with a number of administrators. A royal writ set the temple authorities at Uruk investigating a criminal gang. The instruments this order used against people it distrusted were dismissal, appointment, audit and prosecution — administrative rather than ideological.

Two readings are available and the module declines to choose between them. Either this was an unusually unbrutal empire in its internal management of opinion; or the apparatus of suppression existed and ran on papyrus in Aramaic and has vanished with the rest of the state's paperwork. The second cannot be dismissed, given the section above. What can be said is that nothing in the surviving evidence requires the first reading to be sentimental: an order which had made no attempt to install belief in its subjects had, correspondingly, little reason to police what they thought.

The war that was fought afterwards

There is one genuine propaganda battle in this study, and it takes place after the empire is over.

Within a short time of 539 two documents were in circulation in Babylonia, both written in Akkadian, both in the traditional Babylonian idiom, both hostile to the last king. One is the composition known as the Verse Account of Nabonidus, which attacks him on his religion, his neglect of Marduk's cult, his absence, and his character. The other is the Cyrus Cylinder, in which Marduk searches the world for a righteous ruler, is displeased with the incumbent, and settles on a Persian, who enters the city in peace.

Both were produced by or for the winners, and this study will read them properly in their place. What belongs here is the discipline for reading them, which is the same

discipline this collection applied to Sargon's charter for Assur: **the charge tells you what the intended audience would find persuasive; it does not tell you what happened.** That the Verse Account attacks Nabonidus for neglecting Marduk's cult establishes that neglect of Marduk's cult was a damaging accusation in Babylon in 538. It does not establish that he neglected it.

And on that specific charge there is a document from the other side of the gap. On a basalt stele from Babylon, Nabonidus records that he gave to the three principal temples of the country — Marduk's Esagila at Babylon, Nabû's Ezida at Borsippa and Nergal's Emeslam at Kutha — something on the order of three thousand kilogrammes of silver and a hundred and sixty of gold.

Three tonnes of silver to Marduk's temple, recorded by the king who was afterwards accused, in Marduk's own city, of having neglected Marduk.

The two registers do not have to be reconciled here and this module will not try. Set the accusation beside the donor's own dated statement, and note that the man who paid was still, at the end, the man the priesthood did not want. Whatever the quarrel between Nabonidus and the Esagila was about, the evidence available says it was not that he had stopped paying.

Reading information against the framework

First: genre tracks the metric, and most imperial silence is indifference rather than concealment. An official record is a performance report to a principal, and what it contains tells you what its author was being assessed on and by whom. Assyria's annals report conquests because an Assyrian king was scored on the god's expanding domain. Babylon's inscriptions report bricks because a Babylonian king was scored on the god's provisioning — the metric published in his own titulary. Neither genre is a history; neither was ever meant to be; and the absence of war from a Babylonian inscription is no more evidence of embarrassment than the absence of temple accounts from an Assyrian annal.

Add to the card: before treating a gap in an official record as suppression, identify the metric. The corpus has been reading silences for several studies now, and this is the discipline that keeps that reading honest. The corollary is equally usable: an order that publishes *nothing* aimed at its subject populations has told you that their belief was not load-bearing — and has also told you that it possesses no channel to those populations if it ever needs one.

Second, and the important methodological addition: substrate selects the survivors, and substrate tracks institution. The Babylonian state wrote Aramaic in ink on papyrus and leather. The Babylonian temples wrote Akkadian in cuneiform on

clay. One medium survives burial indefinitely and the other survives it not at all. The consequence is that our entire picture of this order is temple-shaped — not because the temples dominated it, but because the temples were conservative about stationery.

This is not a Babylonian curiosity. It is a general hazard, and it deforms every archive-based judgement the corpus makes: the same effect makes medieval Europe look more clerical than it was, the Roman Republic look more senatorial, and any oral society look empty. **Identify the writing medium of each institution before drawing conclusions from the shape of an archive** — and where one institution chose the durable medium and its rival chose the perishable one, expect to systematically overestimate the first. This study's own central proposition, that one body held the army's supply, the warrant, the revenue and the records, is built substantially from that body's own surviving files, and is discounted accordingly on the face of this module rather than defended.

Third: where the interpretive class is also the fiscal instrument, the deception runs upward. The corpus's default expectation is that an order's manufactured information faces downward, from a ruler to the ruled. Babylonia inverts it. The single best-attested fabrication in the entire period is a stone charter, 346 lines on twelve faces, forged in archaising script by senior priests at Sippar, asserting that a king of the twenty-third century had exempted their estates from crown labour service — produced in the decades when the crown was draining their endowment, and addressed to the king.

The mechanism generalises. **Where a ruler's demands fall on the same body that certifies his legitimacy, and that body cannot resist him by force, it will resist him by documentation — and its instrument will be antiquity, because antiquity is the one claim a ruler can neither audit nor outrank.** Look for manufactured old charters wherever a fiscal squeeze meets an institution with a scriptorium. They are not a sign of an especially corrupt priesthood; they are what a defensive position produces when its only weapon is the archive.

A note on sources. The Cruciform Monument's phrases — the release of the townships from labour service and the closing assertion that the text is not a lie but the truth — are given here in the standard published English rendering and are **not** quoted from a public-domain edition; the scholarly edition is modern and in copyright, and the wording used here follows the translation as reproduced in the secondary literature. Readers should treat the English as approximate and go to the edition. The physical description of the object (BM 91022, found by Rassam at Sippar in 1881, cross-shaped, twelve faces, some 346 lines) is drawn from the museum and published descriptions.

Gadd's characterisation of the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions is quoted exactly from *The Fall of Nineveh* (1923), public domain.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: on the Cruciform Monument's exposure as a forgery and the philological demonstration that the archaising version is a translation of a Neo-Babylonian text found beside it, the work running from the 1940s onward, with the redating to the reign of Nabonidus and the reading of it as a pastiche assembled by Sippar's ecclesiastical officials following the more recent argument; Hanspeter Schaudig on Nabonidus's antiquarianism and on the royal inscriptions; Michael Jursa on the lost state correspondence, and specifically on the state's use of Aramaic on perishable media as the explanation for its absence from the record; Jursa and Shai Gordin on the ousting of the Nūr-Sîn family; Abraham Sachs and Hermann Hunger for the edition of the astronomical diaries, and the recent work on their compilation by families of scholars under the sponsorship of the Esagila assembly; Caroline Waerzeggers on the question of what the chronicles were for; Paul-Alain Beaulieu on Nabonidus and on the post-conquest literature. The figures for Nabonidus's donations to the three great temples are from the basalt stele as published in Schaudig's edition and are cited here in the round form given in the secondary literature.

Weakest evidence, on the face. The dating of the Cruciform Monument to the reign of Nabonidus specifically is one argument among several; that it is a Neo-Babylonian forgery is secure, that it was made early in Nabonidus's reign to elicit his support is a reconstruction, and the module's neat alignment of the forgery with the fiscal squeeze documented in the previous module depends on that reconstruction holding. The claim that the state's records were lost because they were written in Aramaic on papyrus is Jursa's and is well argued but is, in the nature of the case, an argument about things that no longer exist. The near-absence of evidence for suppression is stated in the module as admitting two readings, and the module deliberately declines to choose; a reader who prefers the second reading — that the apparatus existed and vanished with the rest of the state's paper — is not contradicted by anything here. The donation figures from the basalt stele are given as approximate because the module has not collated them against the edition. And the reading of the royal inscription as a performance report scored on a published metric is an interpretation of a genre, offered because it explains the evidence economically, not because any Babylonian ever said so.

MODULE 8

Sat in the Middle Gate

Module 8 · Elite Coordination & the Default — a list of the men who mattered, written by a man they had just conquered; why one of them became king; why four kings in twenty-four years died or were deposed in the richest and most legally secure elite society of the ancient world; and where everyone else was while it happened

The men in the gate

In the summer of 587 or 586 BC the wall of Jerusalem was breached, and a Judaean writer recorded what happened next in a sentence that has survived because it was preserved in a religious book, and which is one of the most useful documents in this study:

> *"And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, even Nergalsharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergalsharezer, Rabmag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon."*

The Hebrew has been garbled in transmission — some of the names have run together, and the modern readings resolve the list differently, giving something like Nergal-šarra-uṣur governor of Sin-magir, Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn the *rab ša-rēši*, and Nergal-šarra-uṣur the *rab mugi*. What is not in doubt is what the passage is: an eyewitness list of the Babylonian high command, taken down by a member of the population it had just conquered, naming individuals by their offices as they sat down in a captured gate to take possession of a city.

It is the Babylonian hierarchy enumerating itself, recorded by somebody with no reason whatever to flatter it.

Two of those men can be followed out of the gate.

The first is *Nergal-šarra-uṣur*, the man holding the office the Babylonians called *simmagir*, which the Hebrew has preserved as a place-name. He was the son of Bēl-šum-iškun, described in the sources as a leader of the Aramaean tribal house of Puqudu; he was an influential and wealthy landowner in his own right; he rose to be one of Nebuchadnezzar's senior officials and appears in the king's own court-list prism; and he married one of the king's daughters, probably Kaššaya, whose name occurs in economic documents alongside both her husband and her father-in-law. Twenty-six

years after he sat down in that gate he murdered Nebuchadnezzar's son and reigned in his place as Neriglissar, king of Babylon.

The second is *Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn*, the *rab ša-rēši*, the chief eunuch — the Nebo-Sarsekim of the Hebrew list. In 2007 Michael Jursa, working through the British Museum's tablets in search of Babylonian officials, found him in an eleven-line receipt from Sippar, BM 114789, dated the eighteenth day of the eleventh month of Nebuchadnezzar's tenth year, 595 BC. It records a mina and a half of gold — three quarters of a kilogram — the property of Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn the chief eunuch, sent by the hand of a eunuch named Arad-Bānītu to the Esagila, and delivered, in the presence of a royal bodyguard and one other witness.

Hold that receipt beside the calendar for a moment, because the coincidence is worth noticing even though nothing can be built on it. The tenth year of Nebuchadnezzar is the year in which the chronicle records a rebellion in Akkad, in which the king killed many of his own soldiers with weapons and took his enemy with his own hand. In the eleventh month of that same year the chief eunuch of the realm made a substantial gift of gold to Marduk's temple, and had a royal bodyguard witness it. What that meant to him is unrecoverable. What it looks like is a man in a dangerous year putting his allegiance on the record in the only currency the arrangement recognised.

That is where this module begins: with a list of offices, and a receipt.

A hierarchy of titles

Compare the Babylonian list with the Assyrian one this collection examined in its predecessor. When the Assyrian arrangement was at maximum risk, a dowager bound it with an oath that enumerated the parties by *category of relation*: the king's brothers, the king's relatives, the officials and the governors, the bearded and the eunuchs, the courtiers, the exempted people, everyone who enters the palace, and the people of Assyria small and great. It is a map of kinds of standing.

The Babylonian list is a set of *job titles*. The *simmagir*. The *rab ša-rēši*. The *rab mugi*. And, in the king's own court-list prism, more than fifty of them arranged in ranks: the household officials, the magnates of Akkad, the city governors, the district officers, the vassal kings.

That difference is not a matter of literary form. It is the shape of the Babylonian elite, and it explains almost everything that follows.

Two kinds of capital in one country

Babylonia in the sixth century contained two entirely different forms of elite wealth, held by two overlapping but distinguishable groups, and the corpus has not previously met a case where both ran side by side.

The first is the one this study examined in Module 2. A prebend — a right to a share of a temple's income attached to a named office, denominated in days of the year — was heritable, divisible into half-days, leasable and saleable for silver, and registered in a wax ledger kept by the temple. It came with a family name recording descent from an ancestor a thousand years back. It was held of a god, not of a king. Over a hundred and fifty texts record the prices at which such rights changed hands. This is elite capital that is portable, priceable, and completely indifferent to who occupies the throne.

The second is the capital of the men in the gate. The office of *simmagir*, or chief eunuch, or governor of a city, or royal resident on a temple board, could not be sold, could not be divided, could not be left to a son, and did not survive a decision by the man who granted it. It was worth a very great deal while held and precisely nothing the moment it was withdrawn.

And the two groups were not the same people. The prebendary class was the ancient urban citizenry of Babylon, Borsippa, Sippar, Uruk and Nippur, defined by descent and admitted through a purity inquest. The men around the throne were disproportionately from outside it. Neriglissar was the son of an Aramaean tribal chief. Nabonidus's mother was a devotee of the moon god at Harran, on the old Assyrian frontier, and his father was not a king and is not recorded as anybody in particular. The founder of the dynasty had announced himself the son of a nobody, and the officer corps he and his son built looks like it.

Why they held together

Now run the default question on the men in the gate, because for them the arrangement worked exactly as a durable hierarchy is supposed to work.

Each of them held a position that existed only because the arrangement existed. Neriglissar was genuinely rich in land before he was ever *simmagir*, and would have remained rich if the empire vanished; but his *standing* — the thing that put him in a captured gate at the head of an army, and eventually on a throne — was an office. Remove the arrangement and the estates remain and the office evaporates. The chief eunuch had nothing whatever except his office; he could not even have heirs. The city governors, the royal residents, the district officers: every one of them held something

that could not be converted into anything else and could not be carried out of the system.

So each man defended his own position, and by defending his own position defended the arrangement, and the whole was held up by nobody intending to hold it up. That is the default, and in Babylonia it was strong. There is no record of a Babylonian magnate operating as an independent power in the manner of the Assyrian Shamshi-ilu, no province that broke away, no governor who ruled a frontier as his own. For eighty-seven years the officer class of this empire coordinated, marched a thousand miles a year, collected the tribute, and went home.

The binding was reinforced by marriage in the way such arrangements usually are. Neriglissar married the king's daughter, and the documents show the three of them — king, daughter, son-in-law — appearing together in economic records. But note what the marriage was doing: it was attaching a powerful outsider to the dynasty, not distributing the dynasty's blood among an established nobility. It bound *him*. It did not bind a class.

Twenty-four years

Nebuchadnezzar died in 562, having reigned forty-three years — very nearly half the empire's existence.

His son Amēl-Marduk succeeded him and ruled two years. The Babylonian tradition preserved by Berossus, and reaching us through Josephus, says he governed lawlessly and without regard for the law, and that a plot was laid against him by his sister's husband, who killed him. That husband was Neriglissar, and in August 560 he took the throne.

Neriglissar reigned three and a half years, campaigned successfully in Cilicia in 557, restored Esagila and Ezida in the correct manner, and died in April 556 of causes unrecorded.

His son Labaši-Marduk, a boy, succeeded him and was killed within a few months.

And in 556 the throne went to Nabonidus, a man in his sixties who had served as an official under Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar, who was not of the royal line, who claimed descent from no previous king, and who came to power in the conspiracy that removed the child.

Four kings in six years. The line of Nabopolassar extinguished twenty-four years after the death of the greatest ruler it produced. And then a seventeen-year reign under a man from outside the family, who left the country for a decade.

Set that against the elite property regime described above and the puzzle is acute. This was the most legally secure, best documented, most commercially sophisticated

elite in the ancient world before Rome. Its wealth was registered, priced, divisible and enforceable in courts. And its politics were as murderous as anything in this collection.

The dog that did not bark

Which brings the module to the question it exists to answer, and the answer is an absence.

Where were the great families while this was happening?

They were not there. Search the record of the succession crises of 562 to 556 for the Egibi, the Nūr-Sîn, the Sîn-lēqi-unninni, the Ekur-zākir, the Šangû-Gula — for any of the family-name houses whose members held the prebends of the great temples and sat in the assemblies that heard disputes — and they are not backing claimants, not resisting coups, not being purged for having backed the wrong man, and not, so far as the evidence goes, doing anything at all. They went on holding their days, selling half-days of the bakers' prebend, witnessing each other's contracts and filing them, through four changes of regime in six years. The genuine rupture in the Babylonian urban elite does not come in 562, or 556, or even 539. It comes in 484, under Xerxes, seventy-two years later and two empires along.

The reason is the finding of Module 2 arriving at its consequence. The dynasty had enriched that class enormously and had never re-sourced its title. A prebendary's claim was on the god's table, registered in the temple's ledger, inherited from an ancestor. It had been worth more under Nebuchadnezzar than under the Assyrians because Nebuchadnezzar had endowed the temples with the plunder of two empires. But it was not *held of* him. When he died, and when his son was murdered, and when the murderer died, and when the murderer's son was murdered, the bakers' prebend of the Ebabbar was worth exactly what it had been worth the week before, and the man who held it was still on the register.

A class that loses nothing by a change of king has no reason to prevent one.

What this does to the proposition being tested

This study's predecessor closed its own module on elite coordination with a proposition and an explicit warning that it was untested. The proposition: that non-convertibility of elite capital simultaneously strengthens the default and makes successions violent, because where a man's whole holding is an office that cannot be sold, moved or bequeathed, every accession is a total revaluation of everything he has, and everyone therefore renegotiates at once. The prediction that followed: hierarchies

with portable elite wealth should have calmer successions and more frequent ordinary defection.

Babylonia had the most portable elite wealth in the ancient world. Its successions were the most violent in the ancient half of this collection. On its face the prediction fails.

But look at how it fails, because the failure identifies what was wrong with the formulation rather than with the mechanism.

The prediction assumed **one** elite. Babylonia had two, and they were not interchangeable. The class with convertible capital — the prebendary families — was not the class that made and unmade kings. The class that made and unmade kings held offices that could not be converted into anything, and for them the original mechanism operated exactly as stated: an accession revalued their entire holding at once, so they fought over it, and four of them in six years fought successfully.

So the refinement, and it is the module's central contribution:

It is not the elite's capital form that predicts succession violence. It is the capital form of the specific faction that controls the succession. A hierarchy is not a single stratum with a single balance sheet. Where the men who can physically determine an accession hold non-convertible positional capital, successions will be violent regardless of how secure everybody else's property is — and everybody else's property being secure is no restraint at all.

And there is a second half to it, which is sharper and less obvious. Convertible elite capital does not produce calmer successions. It produces **absent moderators**. The prebendary families of Babylonia were the only body in the country with the standing, the continuity, the archive and the collective weight to have imposed something on a disputed accession — a designation, an oath, an arbitration. They did not, because they had no stake. Their indifference was not cowardice or weakness; it was an accurate reading of their own position. The very security that the original proposition expected to calm a succession is what removed from the room the one party that might have calmed it.

Portability buys a class safety and costs it relevance. An elite that cannot be hurt by a change of ruler will not spend anything to prevent one.

Why no patch was ever built

There is a further absence, and it is the one that most sharply distinguishes this case from its predecessor.

The Assyrian arrangement responded to each succession disaster by building something. A king who had watched a magnate behave like a monarch subdivided the

provinces and created a channel of correspondence the magnates could not intercept. A king whose father had been murdered by his brothers wrote a succession treaty and made the whole empire swear it. A dowager who had watched an accession war imposed an oath of her own. A king who had just fought two rivals named a crown prince in his first year. None of it was architecture; all of it was scar tissue, applied by named individuals to failures they had personally survived.

Babylonia produced none of this. Four violent successions in six years, and no succession treaty, no loyalty oath binding the officer class, no dowager's covenant, no designation ceremony, no institutional response of any kind that has reached us.

Two explanations are available and the module holds both. The first is the substrate problem stated in Module 7: an oath sworn in Aramaic and written on papyrus would have left nothing, and the absence may be an absence of parchment rather than of policy. The second is structural, and it follows from everything above. Scar tissue is built by a party that has both the motive and the means. In Assyria the injured parties were kings, and kings command scribes and can impose oaths on an empire. In Babylonia the men injured by each succession were the *previous* king's officers, who were dead or dismissed by the time the lesson was available; and the one body with the continuity, the scriptorium and the institutional memory to have built a durable procedure — the temple establishment — was the body with no stake in the outcome.

Institutional scar tissue forms only where the injured party survives the injury with the means to legislate. Where the injury is fatal to exactly the people who suffer it, and the surviving institutions are indifferent, an order can sustain the same wound repeatedly and never develop a response. That is a mechanism the corpus should carry, because it explains a class of cases that otherwise look like stupidity.

The group that stopped benefiting

The card holds that fracture comes from a group with standing and means that has stopped benefiting from the arrangement. This module can now name it, and it is not the officer class.

Module 6 established that the crown's relationship with the temples reversed somewhere in the first half of Nebuchadnezzar's reign: from pouring the plunder of Assyria into their endowments, to requisitioning money and manpower until the Eanna was selling gold and failing to pay its prebendaries in 591, to converting the temples' own internal revenue lines into royal taxes, installing a collection office inside the Esagila, farming out the collection of their dues, and promoting outsiders into their accounts. Module 7 found the same establishment, under the same pressure,

manufacturing a seventeen-hundred-year-old royal charter in archaising script to defend the exemptions the crown was eroding.

That is a group with standing and means which had stopped benefiting. It held the ceremony that made a king, the archives that recorded the country, the estates that fed the army and the ledgers that priced everything.

It did not revolt. It had no soldiers of its own and it did not need any. What a body in that position can do — what it did in 562, and in 560, and in 556 — is nothing.

Whether it did nothing again, at a more consequential moment, is the subject of the modules that follow.

Reading the default against the framework

First, and the correction the collection came here for: the predecessor's proposition is refuted as stated and repaired by specifying the faction. Non-convertible elite capital does make successions violent — Babylonia's officer class demonstrates it as clearly as Assyria's magnates did. What was wrong was the implied unit of analysis. **A hierarchy has as many balance sheets as it has strata, and the one that matters for succession violence is the balance sheet of whoever can physically determine the outcome.** Where those men hold offices that cannot be sold, inherited or carried away, every accession revalues them totally, and no amount of legal security elsewhere in the society will restrain them.

Second, and the counter-intuitive half: convertible elite capital does not calm a succession, it evacuates it. The prediction was that portable wealth would make transitions smoother. What it actually does is remove from the contest the party with the least to gain from disorder. The Babylonian family-name class had continuity, archives, courts, collective standing and a thousand years of institutional memory, and it sat out four coups in six years because none of them cost it a shekel. **Security purchases a class its safety and costs it its leverage** — and an order in which the most stable body is also the most indifferent one has no ballast.

The corpus should note the practical consequence for anyone reading a hierarchy: do not infer stability from the security of property. Ask, separately, whether the men who can decide a succession hold anything they would lose by deciding it badly.

Third: institutional learning requires a survivor who can legislate. Assyria accumulated a visible apparatus of succession machinery because its kings survived their own crises and could impose remedies on an empire. Babylonia accumulated nothing across four violent transitions, because the parties injured were officers who were dead or dismissed before the lesson could be used, and the parties who endured — the temples — had no stake. **Where the injury is fatal to precisely those who suffer**

it, and the durable institutions are indifferent to the outcome, an order will sustain the same failure indefinitely without generating a response.

This is the complement of the predecessor's finding that sophisticated institutions are evidence of prior disaster rather than of clever design. The inverse also holds and is equally useful: **the absence of institutional machinery is not evidence that the disaster did not occur.** It may be evidence that nobody who survived it had any reason to build.

A note on sources. The list of Babylonian officers in the Middle Gate is **quoted exactly** from the Authorised Version, Jeremiah 39:3, which is in the public domain; the module notes on the page that the Hebrew list is corrupt and that modern readings resolve the names and titles differently. The text of BM 114789 — the receipt for a mina and a half of gold sent by Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn the chief eunuch to the Esagila, dated month XI day 18 of Nebuchadnezzar's tenth year — is summarised rather than quoted; the standard English rendering is the British Museum's and is modern, and readers wanting the wording should go to Jursa's publication of the identification.

The account of Amēl-Marduk's reign and death derives from Berossus as transmitted by Josephus and is **paraphrased**, not quoted, because the module has not verified Whiston's exact public-domain wording against the text.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Michael Jursa for the identification of Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn with the Nebo-Sarsekim of Jeremiah, and (with Shai Gordin) for the ousting of the Nūr-Sîn family; Rocío Da Riva for the court-list prism and the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions; Paul-Alain Beaulieu for the reign of Nabonidus, the question of Neriglissar's marriage to Kaššaya, and the prosopography of the period; Frauke Weiershäuser and Jamie Novotny for the recent edition of the inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk, Neriglissar and Nabonidus and for the account of Neriglissar's origins as the son of Bēl-šum-iškun of the house of Puqudu; Caroline Waerzeggers on the family-name class, on prebend prices and on the post-484 rupture; David Weisberg for the original suggestion identifying Neriglissar's wife.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The identification of the *simmagir* Nergal-šarra-uṣur of the court-list and of Jeremiah's gate with the later king Neriglissar is the standard reconstruction and is well supported, but it is a reconstruction assembled from three separate bodies of evidence and it is load-bearing for this module's opening. The marriage to Kaššaya specifically is an inference from economic documents in which her name appears alongside Neriglissar's and his father's; there is no document stating she was his wife, and the module says so. Berossus is a Hellenistic author transmitted through Josephus and is unreliable in detail; the charge that Amēl-Marduk ruled lawlessly is precisely the kind of thing a successor's partisans would say,

and it is reported here as what was said rather than as what happened. The juxtaposition of the chief eunuch's gold payment with the rebellion recorded in the same regnal year is offered as a coincidence worth noticing and explicitly not as a causal claim; the sequence within the year has not been established here. The argument that the great families were absent from the succession crises is an argument from silence in archives that are overwhelmingly commercial and would not necessarily record political alignment even if it existed — this is the module's most serious methodological weakness and it is not resolved. And the explanation for the absence of succession machinery is offered as two competing readings, one of which (the Aramaic-on-papyrus problem) would dissolve the finding entirely if it turned out to be the true one.

MODULE 9

The Head Above the Law Court

Module 9 · Plurality or Foreclosure — what a Babylonian was protected from and what he was not; who bought the cities' liberties and what they were bought to do; why the exemptions ended up carried by a poem, a ritual and a forgery instead of by a court; and the penalty clause that came due in 539

A demonstration of justice

Among the tablets published from the British Museum in 1965 was a text unlike anything previously known: a narrative account, in Late Babylonian language, of a king of Babylon as a reformer of justice. W. G. Lambert, who edited it, argued on linguistic and historical grounds that the king can only be Nebuchadnezzar II.

Its opening describes the condition it claims the king found. Men devoured one another like dogs. The strong plundered the weak, who was not equal to a lawsuit; the rich took the property of the poor. Regent and prince would not take the part of the cripple and the widow before the judge, and if they came before him he would not preside over their case. Judges took presents. Creditors multiplied loaned silver fivefold, broke up houses and seized arable land. And a poor man who obtained a judgment might find that the judge wrote the tablet, rolled his seal on it, and then simply did not hand it over — and that if he pursued the matter his life was in danger and he had nowhere to go.

That is a remarkably precise catalogue of what it is to have no protection: not from the state, but from everybody else with more money than you.

Then the king. He did not rest night or day; he wrote down judgments and decisions; he drew up improved regulations for the city; he built the law court anew.

And then the text gives its demonstration of how the new order was enforced, and it is the reason this module carries the title it does.

A man whose case had been heard, whose verdict had been written and whose tablet had been sealed, came back a second time for judgment. The king ordered the troops to cut off his head and send it through the land. Then a head was cut from stone, made in the likeness of that man's head, inscribed, and fixed on the outer gate of the law court where all mankind could see it. The inscription set out the rule: that a man whose case has been judged and whose tablet has been sealed, and who afterwards returns for judgment, shall have his head cut off in like manner.

For the rest of time, the text says with satisfaction, evil and wicked men saw this, went into hiding, and disappeared.

Here, then, is the module's question in a single object. A royal text advertising the protection of the weak, whose showpiece is a stone replica of a severed head bolted above the door of the courthouse to discourage people from bringing their cases back. Was there liberty in Babylonia, or only rhetoric? And if there was, where did it come from, who paid for it, and what happened to it?

Two different things called protection

The first thing to establish is that "protection" in this order means two entirely distinct things, that Babylonia had a great deal of the first and very little of the second, and that failing to separate them makes the society look far freer than it was.

Protection from private power was real, extensive and documented. Disputes were heard in a court attached to the temple, before the royal resident, the temple administrator and judges, with an assembly of free citizens — the *mār banê* — participating in the adjudication and appearing as witnesses. Verdicts were written on tablets and sealed. Cases could progress upward from the temple's own authority to royal judges and, in serious matters, to the king's court. There was an ordeal procedure: the King of Justice text describes a man who accused another of murder without proving it, and the pair being sent upstream from Sippar to the bank of the Euphrates for a judgment by night before Ea, under guard, with the outcome read from the river.

A Babylonian with a grievance against a neighbour, a creditor, a fraudulent seller or a corrupt official had somewhere to go, and the archives are full of him going there. Module 5 found the same apparatus from the other end: an enforcement machinery that was litigious rather than terroristic, that sued and fined and distrained, and in which the people it acted upon also sat as witnesses.

Protection from the state is the other question entirely, and the Babylonian answer to it has a name: *kidinnūtu*.

The word denotes a protected status attached to a city and its citizens — most consistently Babylon, Sippar and Nippur, with Borsippa and others claiming it too — placing them outside certain of the king's ordinary demands. Its content, as the citizens described it, was freedom from conscript labour, freedom from arbitrary taxation and requisition, freedom from arbitrary fine and imprisonment, and a claim to honest judgment. Those who held it were the *ṣāb kidinni*, the protected people. A letter from the citizens of Babylon to an Assyrian king even asserts that whoever enters inside the city has his protected status secured — a claim of sanctuary attaching to the ground itself.

This is the genuine article: a claim of immunity, asserted by a defined body of subjects, against the sovereign. The question the card asks of any such claim is where it came from — and here the answer is unusually clean, unusually well documented, and not what one expects.

Who bought it, and what for

The liberties of the Babylonian cities were not extracted from a Babylonian king by Babylonian subjects. They were sold to those cities by the Assyrians who were occupying them.

The reconstruction is Michael Jursa's and it is straightforward. From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III onward, the granting of *kidinnūtu* became a token in the negotiation of loyalty. Assyrian kings offered it — to Babylon above all — if the city would side with Assyria rather than with the Chaldean claimants to the Babylonian throne. And the privileges could be withdrawn when a city was brought to submission by force.

That is a bidding instrument, and the auction it belonged to was the three-cornered struggle this study described in its landscape. Babylonia contained an ancient urban civilisation in the old cities and a set of powerful tribal houses in the countryside and the marshes, and for two centuries Assyria could not hold the country because a Chaldean chief who lost a battle could vanish into the reeds and come back. What Assyria could do was split the country: buy the cities, whose loyalty was purchasable because they had something to lose and nowhere to run, and use them against the tribes, who had nothing to buy with and somewhere to go.

The price was a charter, and the Assyrian kings advertised having paid it. Sargon II's cylinder inscription, in Robert Francis Harper's public-domain English of 1901, describes the king as one

> *"who exercised watchful care over Sippar, Nippur, and Babylon, who protected their weak points and restored their ruins"*

— and, a few lines later, as the prince who extended his protection over Harran and, in accordance with the will of Anu and Dagan, *wrote its charter*.

Ashurbanipal, writing to the Babylonians, reminded them of their brotherhood with the citizens of Assyria and of the privileged status he had granted them. Esarhaddon rebuilt Babylon after his father had razed it and — as a letter in the royal correspondence shows — initially taxed its inhabitants anyway, which tells you both that the privilege was a live negotiation and that it was not automatic.

So the card's usual account of where liberties come from needs an extension here. The standard case is a faction inside a hierarchy bargaining from strength, extracting a concession from an apex that does not want to destroy the arrangement, and leaving residue. This is that, with one alteration that changes its whole character: **the faction was not inside the hierarchy at all. It was a conquered population, and the concession was made by a foreign occupier who needed it against a third party.**

The urban citizenry of Babylonia got its liberties because Assyria needed a Babylonian constituency against the Chaldeans. That is the factional fight, and everything that happened to those liberties afterwards follows from who was on which side of it.

What the holders did with a right nobody could enforce

Now the difficulty, which the holders understood perfectly well. A charter granted by a king who conquered you can be withdrawn by the next king who conquers you, and there is no body in Babylonia that can compel a monarch to honour it. So the privileges had to be lodged somewhere a king could not simply revoke them — and the Babylonian answer was to put them in three places, none of which is a court.

The first is a poem. The composition modern scholarship calls *Advice to a Prince* is a text in casuistic form, imitating the style of the omen literature, setting out what will befall a ruler who violates the exemptions of Sippar, Nippur and Babylon. Its clauses read as a bill of rights turned inside out: if the king improperly convicts a citizen of Sippar while acquitting a foreigner, Shamash will set up a foreign justice in his land; if citizens of Nippur are brought before him and he takes a present and convicts them wrongly, Enlil will bring a foreign army to slaughter his troops; if he takes the silver of the citizens of Babylon into his own treasury, or hears a lawsuit of Babylonians frivolously, Marduk will set his enemies on him and give his property to them; if he fines them or imprisons them, or mobilises the three cities and imposes forced labour on them at the herald's proclamation, then — and here the text states the ground of the claim — because Anu, Enlil and Ea in their assembly affirmed the freedom of those people from such obligations, Marduk will turn his land over to his enemy, so that the troops of his land will do forced labour for his enemy instead.

Two features of this text matter as much as its content. First, both surviving manuscripts use archaising sign values and older grammatical forms and a heavy load of logograms — affectations, in the judgement of the scholarship, intended to make the text look older than it is. Second, it was actually *used*: it is quoted in a letter sent from Nippur to the Assyrian king, asking for support in rebuilding the city.

The second place is a ritual. Module 3 established what happened to a Babylonian king on the fifth of Nisannu: stripped of his insignia by the high priest, struck on the cheek, made to kneel, and required to recite a denial. Look again at what he had to deny. That he had destroyed Babylon. That he had ordered her people dispersed. That he had neglected the Esagila's rites. That he had thrown down the walls. And that he had *struck the cheek of the protected citizens* — the *ṣāb kidinni* — or caused their humiliation.

The charter is in the king's own mouth, recited annually, on his knees, in front of the god, with his crown on a chair behind him.

The third place, when the first two stopped working, was a forgery. Module 7 described the Cruciform Monument: 346 lines in archaising script on twelve faces of a stone cross, purporting to record a grant by a king of the twenty-third century BC releasing thirty-eight townships to the Ebabbar at Sippar, of whose labour he says he took no advantage and whom he did not call up for service. It was manufactured in the Neo-Babylonian period — on the strongest current argument, early in the reign of Nabonidus, by senior ecclesiastical officials at Sippar.

Set the three together and the pattern is unmistakable. A poem that pretends to be older than it is. A liturgy in which the king swears the charter every spring. A stone monument pretending to be seventeen centuries old. **Not one of them is an institution that can compel anybody.** The Babylonian liberties had migrated entirely into genre — into literature, ritual and antiquarian fabrication — because there was no organ of state that could enforce them and no armed party willing to.

That migration is the diagnostic. **Where a right is carried by poetry, ceremony and forged charters rather than by a body with the power to compel, it has no enforcement; and the appearance of manufactured antiquity is the sign that the holders know it.**

The dynasty that came from the other side

Which brings the module to the loss, and to the thing that makes this case unlike most in the collection: Babylonia is a study in liberties going backwards.

Consider the position of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty with respect to the auction described above. The privileges of the ancient cities had been bid up by Assyrian kings buying urban loyalty *against the Chaldean and Aramaean south*. The dynasty that took Babylon in 626 came, in all probability, out of that south — and its founder's father had been the Assyrian-appointed governor of Uruk, which is to say the family had been on the administering side of the bargain rather than the purchasing side. Its greatest officer, Neriglissar, was the son of an Aramaean tribal chief of the house of Puqudu.

The dynasty never described itself as Chaldean and never described itself as anything else either.

A privilege bought by a party that no longer exists, to secure a constituency against an enemy that no longer exists, held by a class the new dynasty had enriched but never tied — that is a claim with no living purchaser. And the record shows exactly what happened to it.

The Neo-Babylonian kings did not abolish the exemptions; nothing so visible. Module 6 traced the erosion line by line. A royal resident, the *qīpu*, sat at the head of every major temple's administration. Priestly appointments required royal confirmation, so the crown held the key to the gate of the privileged class. Royal requisitions for money and manpower drove the Eanna to sell gold and fail to pay its own prebendaries in Nebuchadnezzar's fourteenth year. The *upnu*, an internal fee the temple's own scribe had charged on the temple's own transactions, was converted into a tax payable to the crown. From the middle of the century, state taxes on temple income were collected by an official housed inside the Esagila. Collection was farmed out, and outsiders like the rent-farmer Šumu-ukīn were promoted into the revenue stream over the heads of the incumbent families.

None of that abolished a charter. All of it hollowed one.

And the timing of the Cruciform Monument, if the current dating holds, tells the rest. Somewhere in this period the priests of Sippar concluded that their exemptions needed better documentary support than they had, and manufactured it. **A liberty that has to be forged is a liberty that has already been lost.**

The penalty clause

There remains the question of what the holders of an unenforceable right can actually do, and the Babylonian material gives an unusually explicit answer, because they wrote the sanction down.

Advice to a Prince does not threaten a king with rebellion. It does not threaten him with the withdrawal of cooperation, or with the courts, or with an assembly, or with a strike of the temples. It threatens him with a foreign army. If he mobilises the citizens of the three cities for forced labour, Marduk will hand his country over to his enemy — and the men he conscripted will do forced labour for that enemy instead.

Read as a statement about power, that is a confession. A party whose only available sanction is that a god will give the country to a foreigner has told you plainly that it cannot enforce its rights itself. And it has told you something else, which the last modules of this study will have to take seriously: it has specified, in advance and in

writing, the outcome it regards as the just consequence of a king who taxes and conscripts the protected cities.

In 539 a document was produced at Babylon, in Akkadian, in the traditional idiom, stating that Marduk looked over the lands, was displeased with the incumbent, searched for a righteous ruler, found a Persian, called him by name, and gave him the country — and that the Persian entered the city without a battle.

Whatever else that document is, and it is certainly a conqueror's manifesto by a party with every reason to write one, its *form* was not invented in 539. It is the enforcement clause of the Babylonian city charter, drafted centuries earlier by the men who held the charter, being reported as satisfied.

Reading liberty against the framework

First, a new provenance for the card: liberties can be purchased by an outside power to split a conquered country, and they outlive the purchaser. The collection's standing account is that protections originate in factional fights inside a hierarchy — a group with standing and means extracting a concession from an apex that would rather concede than break the arrangement — and that the concessions accrete as residue which later benefits people who had no part in winning them.

Babylonia adds a case in which the conceding party was a foreign occupier and the beneficiary was a conquered population. Assyria could not hold Babylonia against the tribal south, so it bought the ancient cities: charters of exemption from labour and taxation, granted as a token in the negotiation of loyalty, withdrawable on submission. **Where a conquered country contains two populations with divergent interests, an occupier will buy the one that can be bought, and the price will be a charter.**

The consequences run in both directions and both are worth carrying. Such liberties are *real* — they were claimed, litigated, cited in petitions and eventually recited by kings under oath. But they carry a specific fragility that liberties won from within do not: **they have no domestic constituency that fought for them, and no purchaser once the occupier is gone.** A successor regime drawn from the population the charter was bought to defeat inherits an obligation it has no factional reason to honour, and will hollow it out — not by abolition, which is visible, but by residency, appointment, requisition and the conversion of internal revenues, which are not.

Second, and a distinction the card should keep permanently separate: protection from private power and protection from the state are different variables, and an order can score high on one and near zero on the other. Babylonia had courts, sealed verdicts, citizen assemblies participating in adjudication, appeal upward to royal judges, an ordeal procedure, and a king who published a text

advertising himself as the protector of the widow and the cripple against corrupt judges and usurers who multiplied a loan fivefold. All of that was real, and for the man being crushed by a creditor it was the difference between ruin and redress.

It says nothing whatever about whether he could resist the crown. **A society rich in horizontal protection will look far freer than it is**, because the visible machinery — courts, verdicts, appeals, assemblies — is the same machinery a genuinely constitutional order would use, and it is doing entirely different work. Ask separately, always, what happens when the adversary is the state.

Third: an unenforceable right migrates into genre, and manufactured antiquity is the tell. Babylonia's exemptions ended up carried by an omen-form poem written in deliberately archaic Akkadian, by a liturgy in which the king recited them in the negative on his knees once a year, and by a forged stone monument seventeen centuries too old. Not one of those is a body that can compel. **When a protection is found lodged in literature, ritual and antiquarian fabrication rather than in an institution with the power to enforce, it is a protection in decline** — and the appearance of forgeries dates the decline, because men do not manufacture charters while they still have live ones.

Fourth, and the one that carries into the rest of this study: read the sanction clause to find out what the holders can actually do. A right whose stated penalty is a lawsuit is held by people who have courts. A right whose stated penalty is rebellion is held by people who have soldiers. Babylonia's charter specifies that a king who taxes and conscripts the protected cities will have his country given to a foreign enemy by the god — and that is the sanction available to a party with a scriptorium, a liturgy and no armed force at all.

Such a party cannot depose anybody. What it can do is decline to certify, decline to obstruct, and recognise a successor — and it has already written down, in advance, the terms on which it would consider that outcome just.

A note on sources. Sargon II's description of himself as exercising watchful care over Sippar, Nippur and Babylon, protecting their weak points and restoring their ruins, is **quoted exactly** from the cylinder inscription in Robert Francis Harper's *Assyrian and Babylonian Literature* (1901), which is in the public domain; the phrase about writing a charter refers in the original to Harran and is so identified in the text.

The *King of Justice* text is **paraphrased throughout and not quoted**: W. G. Lambert's edition and translation appeared in *Iraq* in 1965 and is in copyright, and the module has rendered its content in its own words, including the description of the disorder the king claims to have found, the account of the reformed law court, the execution and the stone head fixed on its outer gate, and the river ordeal. The same

applies to *Advice to a Prince*, whose clauses are summarised rather than quoted, the standard English being Lambert's of 1960. Readers should go to the editions; the wording here is mine and the argument depends on the content, not the phrasing.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Michael Jursa on taxation and fiscal administration in Babylonia, and specifically for the reconstruction of *kidinnūtu* as a token in the negotiation of loyalty offered by Assyrian kings against the Chaldean claimants and withdrawable on submission — the finding on which this module's central argument rests; Grant Frame and A. K. Grayson on the inscription of Ashurbanipal mentioning the *kidinnu* of Sippar and on the exemption of Borsippa; the recent study of the *kidinnu* motif for the citizens' sanctuary claim and for the term *ṣāb kidinni*; W. G. Lambert for the *King of Justice* text and its attribution to Nebuchadnezzar; the current scholarship on *Advice to a Prince* for its archaising affectations, its manuscripts, and its citation in a letter from Nippur; Shalom Holtz and Małgorzata Sandowicz on Neo-Babylonian court procedure and the composition of the adjudicating assembly; Caroline Waerzeggers on priestly initiation and royal confirmation; and the literature on the Cruciform Monument discussed in Module 7.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The attribution of the *King of Justice* text to Nebuchadnezzar II is Lambert's argument from language and from the list of conquests; the text does not name its king, and if the attribution fails the module's opening loses its date though not its point. The dating of *Advice to a Prince* is genuinely unresolved — the archaising features that make it interesting are precisely what make it hard to date, and it may be considerably older or younger than the period this module places it against. The reconstruction of *kidinnūtu* as an Assyrian bidding instrument is well supported but is a modern synthesis; no ancient source states the strategy in those terms, and the module has built a good deal on it. The claim that the Neo-Babylonian dynasty had no factional reason to honour the urban charters depends on the identification of its origins, which Module 2 flagged as contested. The alignment of the Cruciform Monument's manufacture with the fiscal squeeze is a reconstruction inherited from Module 7 with its uncertainty intact. And the closing observation — that the Cyrus Cylinder's form reproduces the sanction clause of the city charter — is an argument about genre, offered because the resemblance is striking and the priority is not in doubt; it is not evidence about anybody's intentions in 539, and the module that follows will have to establish those separately.

MODULE 10

No Date Was Missed

Module 10 · Change & Collapse — nineteen days in the autumn of 539, the one place where there was killing, the three cities whose gods stayed at home, the strongest walls in the world and why they were irrelevant; and the question of whether the famous collapse was a collapse at all

Nineteen days

The most famous fall of a city in the ancient world took under three weeks and contained one battle.

In the month Tashritu of 539 — late September or October — a Persian army under Cyrus met the army of Akkad at Opis on the Tigris. The Babylonian force broke. The chronicle records that plunder was carried off and that people were slaughtered, in a damaged line whose sense translators have read in more than one way, but which on any reading describes a real defeat with real dead.

On the fourteenth of Tashritu, Sippar was taken without a battle, and Nabonidus fled.

On the sixteenth, two days later, Ugbaru the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon — without a battle. The returning king was captured in the city.

For the remainder of that month, shield-bearing troops from Gutium stood around the gates of the Esagila.

On the third of Arahsamnu, our twenty-ninth of October, Cyrus himself entered Babylon, and peace was proclaimed to the city.

That is the whole of it. From the destruction of the field army to a new king in the capital: about nineteen days. No siege. No storm. No fire. No destruction layer in the archaeology. No massacre in the city recorded by anyone. And, as the modules that follow will show, no break in the tablet series either.

This module has to establish who changed what — and the framework it belongs to holds a hard proposition about that question. Structural change does not come from below, because a durable order is an armed settlement and only those who command organised force can alter it. A rising against an intact floor is crushed with something close to regularity. Change comes when the floor itself cracks, and it cracks in four ways: the elite fractures and arms the people against itself; it exhausts its floor in war and must pay the survivors; it is conquered by a rival elite; or it overbreeds, producing

more claimants than it can seat until the surplus turns revolutionary and leads the crowd as fuel.

Babylonia in 539 is a test of that proposition with unusually clean evidence, and it returns a clean answer — plus a complication about what the word *collapse* is doing.

The one place there was killing

Take the four cracks in turn and start with the one that plainly applies.

Opis was a conquest by another hierarchy, and it was the only place in the whole sequence where the Babylonian order was broken by force. A rival empire's field army destroyed a Babylonian field army on the Tigris, and everything that followed — Sippar's surrender on the fourteenth, Babylon's on the sixteenth, the king's capture, the new proclamation — followed from that afternoon.

Note what is *not* in the record anywhere. There is no popular rising in Babylonia in 539. No revolt of oblates, no rising of the deported Judaean settlers on the Nippur canals, no urban insurrection, no slave movement, no peasant war. Module 5 established that the common man of Babylonia had been doing measurably better under this dynasty than under its predecessor — wages rising, prices falling, free hired labour expanding, self-sale essentially vanished from a documentary record that would have caught it. Whatever was wrong in 539 was not wrong at the bottom, and the bottom did nothing.

Where the common man appears in this story, he appears at Opis, in the line about slaughter. He is the casualty list. He is not the agent of anything, and the framework's expectation is met exactly.

The strongest walls in the world

Which raises the obvious question: how did the best-fortified city on earth change hands in two days without a fight?

Babylon's defences were famous in antiquity and are famous still — a double wall, a moat fed from the Euphrates, gates the Greeks counted among the wonders of the world. Herodotus, writing a century later, could not accept that such a place had simply been walked into, and supplied a stratagem: Cyrus diverting the river and his men entering along the drained bed. It is a good story, it is what was being said in the fifth century, and there is no contemporary support for it. It belongs in this study as evidence about the Greek imagination rather than about 539.

The real answer requires no stratagem, and it is a point the corpus should hold generally. **A wall is not a floor.** Fortification is a force multiplier for an army that still

exists; it buys time for a relieving force, or exhausts a besieger who must be fed while he waits. It does nothing whatever once the field army has been destroyed and the man who should be directing the defence has run. Babylon's walls in October 539 were defended by whatever garrison remained after Opis, under nobody in particular, in a city whose king had fled to Borsippa and whose co-regent's fate is unknown. Walls in that condition are a building.

The corpus should therefore decline to read defensive capital as floor strength. The question is never how thick the wall is; it is whether there is an intact organisation of armed men behind it and someone with the authority to order them to fight.

The gods that did not come

Now the second crack — fracture — and here the evidence is a single line in the chronicle that is easy to read past.

In the months before the Persian attack, Nabonidus gathered the divine statues of the Babylonian cities into the capital. The chronicle lists them arriving: the gods of Marad, Zababa and the gods of Kish, Ninlil and the gods of Hursagkalamma; and until the end of Elul the gods of Akkad continued to enter Babylon.

Then this: the gods of Borsippa, Cutha and Sippar did not enter.

Those three are not minor shrines. They are Nabû's Ezida at Borsippa, Nergal's Emeslam at Cutha, and Šamaš's Ebabbar at Sippar — three of the greatest sanctuaries in the country, and precisely the temples to which Nabonidus had, by his own basalt stele, given enormous quantities of silver and gold. The scribe thought their absence worth recording in a document that otherwise wastes no words.

What it means cannot be recovered and this module will not pretend otherwise. It may be refusal. It may be that Nabonidus exempted them, or that the arrangements were incomplete, or that these three, being nearest to Babylon or most senior, were treated differently. But note where Sippar appears next in the same text: it is the city that surrendered to Cyrus without a battle on the fourteenth of Tashritu, two days before the capital. And note that Sippar is where the Cruciform Monument — a forged seventeen-hundred-year-old charter exempting the Ebabbar's people from royal labour service — appears to have been manufactured, on the current reading, early in this same reign.

That is the only visible sign in the entire record of anything that could be called fracture inside the Babylonian hierarchy, and it is thin. There is one other candidate and it is thinner. Ugbaru, the governor of Gutium who took Babylon, has long been identified with the Gobryas of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* — a Babylonian noble slighted by his king who defects to Cyrus and leads the assault. Pierre Briant judged that

Xenophon's fiction may rest on a genuine memory of a provincial governor in the Diyala foothills who had gone over some years earlier. But Grayson, editing the chronicle, kept the names distinct, and the caution is sound: the disaffected insider who opens the gates is a folktale shape — it is the same story Herodotus tells about Harpagus and Astyages — and a name-match in a Greek romance is not evidence.

So: fracture, possible, unproven, and if real then quiet. Nobody armed anybody. Nobody declared for a rival. What may have happened is that three great temple cities declined to do what the king asked, and one of them opened its gates.

The rites that were not interrupted

Then the sentence that gives this module its title, and which is the most extraordinary thing in the Babylonian record of 539.

For the fortnight between the sixteenth of Tashritu and the end of the month, Persian shield-bearers surrounded the gates of the Esagila. And the chronicle records that there was no interruption of the rites in the Esagila or the other temples, and that no date for a performance was missed.

An empire had ended. Its king was a prisoner. A foreign army was standing at the doors of the national shrine. And the daily offerings went in on schedule, the prebendaries turned up on their days, and the calendar ran without a gap.

Read that beside the entries from earlier in the same document — the years in which the king was at Taymāʾ, and Nabû did not come to Babylon, and Bēl did not go out, and the New Year festival did not take place, *and the offerings in Esagila and Ezida were presented as in normal times*. The same scribe, in the same register, recording the same thing twice: that the institution kept running whether or not there was a king in it.

That is the answer to the question this module was set. The Babylonian temples had already demonstrated, across a decade of Nabonidus's absence, that they did not require a king in order to function. In 539 they demonstrated it again with a different army at the gate.

What continued

The pattern extends well beyond the liturgy, and the documentary turn in the scholarship has made it the deflationary control on everything else about 539.

The archives do not break. A scribe at Sippar is attested continuously in the record from 545 to 500 — across the conquest without a gap. The *šandabakku*, the traditional governor of Nippur, held his post from Nabonidus's seventeenth year into the seventh

year of Cambyses. The house of Egibi, whose archive runs five generations, went on trading under Cyrus, under Cambyses and under their successors. The prebends were still held, sold and inherited; the wax ledgers were still kept; the courts still sat with the royal resident and the temple administrator and an assembly of citizens; the oblates still wore the star on the hand; the deported Judaeans at Āl-Yahūdu still held their plots and paid their *ilku*.

What changed was the name in the date formula.

Cyrus then did the one thing that cost him nothing and bought him everything: he sent the gathered statues back to their own cities. And a document was produced at Babylon, in Akkadian, in the traditional idiom, stating that Marduk had looked over the lands, found the incumbent wanting, searched for a righteous ruler, called a Persian by name and given him the country, and that he had entered the city in peace.

Module 9 established what that document's form is. It is the enforcement clause of the Babylonian city charter — the sanction *Advice to a Prince* had specified centuries earlier for a king who taxes and conscripts the protected cities: that Marduk will turn his land over to his enemy. The interpretive class of Babylonia had written down, long in advance, the terms on which it would regard exactly this outcome as just. In 539 it certified that the terms had been met.

That is not a class rising. It is a class doing what a body with archives, a liturgy and no soldiers can do: declining to obstruct, and ratifying.

Was it a collapse?

Put the ledger together and the honest answer is that 539 was a change of apex and not a change of arrangement.

The floor of force was broken — at Opis, by another hierarchy, in one battle. The apex was replaced. Everything underneath it continued: the settlement of who held what, the extraction machinery, the temples and their estates, the family-name class and its prebends, the courts, the state dependants on their crown plots, the scribes, the calendar, the observation programme, the prices. The empire's territory transferred whole into a larger empire and its administrative personnel largely stayed at their desks.

By the standards this collection has used elsewhere, that is a conquest, and a remarkably clean one. It is not a collapse.

Where the collapse actually was

The structural change came fifty-five years later, and it also came from the hierarchy side.

In 484 BC Babylonia revolted against Xerxes — twice, under men who took Babylonian throne names and claimed the kingship, which is to say under claimants from the elite and not from the fields. Both were crushed. And in the aftermath a great many families of central Babylonia disappear from high office, and a whole set of major archives simply stops.

That is the rupture. The class that had held the prebends since before Nabopolassar, that had sat out four coups in six years, that had watched a Persian army stand at the Esagila gates without missing a liturgical date — that class was broken in 484, by an apex repricing the arrangement after a fracture it had just put down.

The framework's proposition holds through both events and holds better across the pair than across either alone. In 539 a rival hierarchy conquered. In 484 a faction of the hierarchy fractured, was crushed, and the surviving apex responded by dissolving the settlement it had inherited. At no point in either does the common man appear as an agent. He appears at Opis as the dead, and in 484 presumably as the levies of two claimants, and nowhere as the author of anything.

And the predisposing condition beneath both is the one Module 6 documented: an empire whose external revenue was capped from about 570 and which spent the following decades converting its own institutions into revenue — requisitioning until a temple sold its gold, turning internal fees into crown taxes, farming out collection, promoting outsiders, and finally sending its king to occupy an Arabian oasis for a decade in search of a trade route. That is fiscal exhaustion, and it is the second of the four cracks, operating not as the proximate agent but as the reason the third crack found so little resistance.

Reading change against the framework

First, and the correction the case forces: separate a change of apex from a change of arrangement, and date them separately. The collection has generally treated the fall of an order as one event with one date. Babylonia shows two, fifty-five years apart, and the famous one is much the smaller. In 539 a foreign army broke a field army, replaced a king, and left the settlement, the extraction machinery, the courts, the property regime and the interpretive class exactly where they were. In 484 the arrangement itself was dissolved.

A conquest that leaves the settlement and the interpretive class in place is a change of management. The structural change, where it comes at all, comes later — when the new apex has acquired a reason to reprice, and the usual trigger is a fracture it has just crushed. The corpus should ask of every "fall" it examines: what actually

stopped? If the archives, the property titles, the courts and the personnel continue, the order did not end; its ownership changed.

Second: a wall is not a floor. Babylon possessed the strongest fortifications in the world and they were irrelevant, because the field army had been destroyed a fortnight earlier at Opis and the man who should have commanded the defence had fled. Fortification is a multiplier on an army that still exists and a building once it does not. **Defensive capital should never be read as floor strength**; the question is always whether an intact organisation of armed men stands behind it under someone with the authority to give orders.

Third, and the compounding of this study's spine: a body that cannot depose a ruler can still ratify his replacement, and ratification costs it nothing. This is where the earlier modules arrive.

Module 2 found that the dynasty enriched the family-name class enormously and never re-sourced its title, so the class was never tied. Module 6 found that the crown then reversed direction and drew that same class down. Module 8 found the class sitting out four violent successions without a trace, because none of them cost it anything. Module 9 found its charter specifying, as the penalty for a king who taxes and conscripts the protected cities, that the god would hand the country to a foreigner.

In 539 a foreigner arrived, and the shield-bearers stood at the gates, and no liturgical date was missed.

The general statement: **where the party that certifies a ruler's legitimacy holds nothing of him, an incumbent has no hold on it and a conqueror can have it for the price of a proclamation.** Certification is the cheapest thing in the world to transfer, because transferring it requires the certifying body to do nothing at all — and doing nothing is available to every institution, at every moment, at no cost, without conspiracy, coordination or risk. It is the most underrated move in the whole repertoire of elite behaviour, and it does not leave a document, which is why studies of collapse routinely miss it.

Fourth, on the four cracks. The case is a clean instance of conquest by a rival hierarchy, with fiscal exhaustion as the predisposing condition, a possible but unproven fracture at the margin, and no visible elite overproduction at all. And the common man is precisely where the framework puts him: present at the opening, as the dead at Opis, and the author of nothing. There was no rising in Babylonia in 539 — not because the population was content in any sentimental sense, but because a population without organised force does not alter an armed settlement, and because, on the numbers, this particular population had less reason to try than most.

A note on sources. The Nabonidus Chronicle is **paraphrased throughout and quoted only in short phrases**, for the reason given in earlier modules: every English translation available to me — Grayson's, Glassner's, Kuhrt's and the versions derived from them — is in copyright, and Sidney Smith's public-domain edition of 1924 was not accessible in this work. The events reported here as from the chronicle are: the gathering of the gods of Akkad into Babylon through Elul and the notice that those of Borsippa, Cutha and Sippar did not enter; the battle at Opis, the retreat of the army of Akkad, the plunder and the slaughter; the capture of Sippar without a battle on the fourteenth of Tashritu and Nabonidus's flight; the entry of Ugbaru and the army of Cyrus into Babylon without a battle on the sixteenth, and the king's capture; the shield-bearers of Gutium at the gates of the Esagila until the end of the month, with no interruption of rites and no performance date missed; Cyrus's entry on the third of Arahsamnu and the proclamation of peace; the return of the gods to their cities; and Ugbaru's death shortly afterwards. Readers building on any of these should go to the editions. Herodotus's account of the diverted river is summarised from the standard text and treated here as evidence about the fifth-century Greek imagination.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Michael Jursa on the continuity of the archives across the conquest, which is the deflationary control the module leans on hardest; Amélie Kuhrt on the reading of the Opis line and on the Cylinder as a conqueror's document; Paul-Alain Beaulieu on the reign of Nabonidus and on the identity of the commander at Opis; Pierre Briant for the argument that Xenophon's Gobryas preserves a memory of a defecting provincial governor, and A. K. Grayson for the contrary caution keeping Ugbaru, Gubaru and Gobryas distinct; Gauthier Tolini on the mechanics of the capture; Caroline Waerzeggers and Karlheinz Kessler for the revolts of 484 and the subsequent exclusion of central Babylonian families from high office and the end of the archives; the continuity data on the Sippar scribe, the Nippur *šandabakku* and the Egibi house are drawn from the recent synthesis of the documentary evidence for the transition.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The reading of the three cities whose gods did not enter Babylon as a possible sign of fracture is the module's most speculative move, and it is speculative: the line records an absence and gives no reason, and there are innocent explanations. The Ugbaru-as-defector identification is presented as doubted and is not relied on. The Opis line is damaged and translators disagree about who was massacred; the module has used it only for the fact of a real battle with real casualties. The absence of a destruction layer and of any recorded massacre in Babylon is an argument from absence, though a broad and consistent one, and it is the standard reading. The characterisation of 484 as the true structural rupture depends on

Waerzeggers's "end of archives" argument, which is influential and is not universally accepted in its strongest form. And the closing proposition — that certification transfers costlessly because it requires the certifying body to do nothing — is a structural inference from the pattern this study has assembled across four modules; it is not something any Babylonian source states, and by its nature it is a claim about an act that leaves no evidence, which the reader should weigh accordingly.

MODULE 11

Four Thousand and Six Hundred

Module 11 · The Grim Accounting — what the sword cost across eighty-seven years, counted for once by the victims rather than the killers; where the metabolic note was called and where it was not; and why the empire that was never forgotten is remembered in the words of the people it deported

The only number anybody counted

At the end of the book of Jeremiah, appended to the account of the fall of Jerusalem, there is a list. It gives three deportations, by regnal year, with a figure for each and a total:

> *"This is the people whom Nebuchadrezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand Jews and three and twenty: In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty and two persons: In the three and twentieth year of Nebuchadrezzar Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred forty and five persons: all the persons were four thousand and six hundred."*

That is an administrative document, or a copy of one. It is dated by regnal year, it distinguishes three separate operations, its components add correctly, and it has the flat character of something taken off a register rather than composed. It is very nearly the only precise number in the entire Neo-Babylonian accounting, and it comes not from Babylon but from the people Babylon carried off.

That inversion organises this module and needs stating before anything else, because it is the exact opposite of the situation in this collection's previous study. Assyria enumerated its victims itself, in its own royal inscriptions, in figures running to hundreds of thousands, and recorded nothing whatever about its own dead, because the genre forbade it. Babylon recorded neither. Its kings wrote about bricks. So the sword column here has to be assembled from Hebrew scripture, from archaeological destruction layers, from a chronicle that does not boast, and from the arithmetic of what a campaign of that kind does — and the resulting ledger is thinner, less confident, and drawn very largely from the perspective of the people on the receiving end.

There is a second problem with the figure above, and it is not small. The book of Kings gives quite different numbers for the same events — ten thousand carried away in the first deportation, and elsewhere seven thousand men of might with a thousand craftsmen and smiths. Four thousand six hundred against something over eighteen thousand: the two accounts differ by a factor of four. The usual reconstructions suppose that Jeremiah's list counts adult males only, or a particular administrative category, or a particular set of convoys. Nobody knows. **The figures should therefore be carried as a range of roughly four and a half to twenty thousand deported from Judah**, with the honest observation that the precise-looking number is precise about something we cannot identify.

The sword column

With that caveat, the account.

Assyria, 616–609. The dynasty's founding war. Assur fell in 614, and the chronicle records that the city was destroyed and that cruel havoc was made of its chief men. Nineveh fell in 612, and the chronicle says the spoil was a quantity beyond counting and the city was turned into a mound and a ruin — the very phrase Assyrian kings had used of their own conquests. Harran fell in 610 and was retaken and lost again in 609. Nineveh at its height was among the largest cities on earth, its walled area on the order of seven hundred and fifty hectares, with a population that has been put in the low hundreds of thousands. No figure survives for how many died. The archaeology of the citadel shows burning and bodies in the gate passages.

Whatever the number, this was the largest single act of killing in the eighty-seven years, and it was performed before the empire technically existed.

Ashkelon, 604. In his first year Nebuchadnezzar took the city and, in the chronicle's phrase, turned it into a mound and heaps of ruins. Excavation has confirmed a comprehensive destruction of the Philistine city at exactly this date — buildings burnt, the population gone, the site abandoned for decades. Its rulers appear afterwards in Babylon on the ration lists.

Judah, 597. Jerusalem invested in Kislimu, taken on the second of Adar; the king captured, a new one installed, heavy tribute sent to Babylon, and the first deportation.

Judah, 588–586. The methodical reduction of a small kingdom's fortified places, conducted from a forward headquarters at Riblah. The Lachish ostraca catch a moment inside it: an officer reporting that he is still watching for the fire signals of Lachish and that Azekah's have stopped. Jerusalem under investment for something between eighteen and thirty months; famine in the city; the wall breached; the temple burnt and the walls thrown down.

Then Riblah, where the Hebrew record is specific and where this study's discipline requires the specificity be preserved rather than summarised. The captain of the guard took the chief priest, the second priest, three keepers of the door, an officer set over the men of war, seven men of the king's presence, the principal scribe of the host, and threescore men of the people of the land, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and there:

> *"And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land."*

The king's own sons were killed in front of him before he was blinded and taken to Babylon.

That is roughly seventy-five named or enumerated men executed in one place on one day, together with the destruction of a royal line — the elimination of a governing class as a deliberate administrative act, performed at a headquarters, on a list.

Tyre, c. 586–573. Thirteen years of blockade. What that costs the besieged is unrecorded and what it cost the besiegers is stated by a contemporary in Babylonia: every head made bald and every shoulder peeled, and no wages for it. Thirteen years of an army camped on a coast is thirteen years of dysentery, and the deaths belong in this column even though nobody counted them.

Egypt, 601. The one field battle after Carchemish. Mutual heavy losses; a year at home rebuilding the chariot arm.

Arabia, 599 and after; Cilicia, 557; and the annual circuit. Four decades of a mustered army marching a thousand miles and back. The chronicle records raids on the Arabs of the desert and their possessions and cattle carried off. Neriglissar's Cilician campaign is recorded with unusual violence for this dynasty. And every one of the "unopposed" years still involved an army in the field, with what that implies for the countryside it passed through and for the men in it.

Babylonians, killed by Babylonians. In the tenth year, rebellion in Akkad: the king killed many of his own soldiers and took his enemy with his own hand. In 560, Amēl-Marduk murdered. In 556, the boy Labaši-Marduk murdered. In 539, the army of Akkad broken at Opis with plunder taken and people slaughtered.

And the deportations, which are the empire's characteristic instrument. Judaeans in three or more operations. Ashkelonites, Hamathites, Tyrians, Neirabites, Gazans and others, settled in blocks on the canals around Nippur. No global figure exists. Assyria's total across three centuries has been estimated by Bustenay Oded at something over four million; the Neo-Babylonian total is unknown and was certainly far smaller, both because the empire was shorter and because its deportations were

concentrated on the Levant rather than run continuously across a whole imperial system.

Set beside the previous study, this is a much smaller column. That is a statement about scale and duration, not about character, and it should not be allowed to soften into a compliment. The men executed at Riblah were as dead as anyone Assyria killed.

The note that was not called

Now the metabolic column, and this is where the case earns its place in the pair.

The proposition is that coordination and intensive agriculture lift a population above what the land would carry unaided — through irrigation, storage, redistribution, terracing, and the administration that maintains all four — and that the lift is a debt. When the coordination is disrupted, the note is called, and it is paid in famine and disease by people who had no part in the arrangement's politics. Southern Mesopotamia is the paradigm case: a country that grows nothing without led water, whose canals silt annually, and whose entire population sits on top of a maintenance obligation that somebody must organise every year.

Assyria's note was called, and catastrophically. Its northern irrigation system went out of use after 612, the survey record shows settlement collapse across the heartland, and two centuries later a passing Greek could walk past Nineveh and be told it was called Mespila and had once been inhabited by the Medes.

Babylonia's note was not called at all.

The evidence is the evidence of Module 10, read for a different purpose. The archives do not break across 539: a Sippar scribe is attested continuously from 545 to 500, the governor of Nippur holds his post from Nabonidus's seventeenth year into Cambyses's seventh, the Egibi house trades on. The temples do not miss a liturgical date while Persian shield-bearers stand at the Esagila's gates. The astronomical diaries, which record the market price of barley, dates, cuscuta, cress, sesame and wool every single month, run straight through the conquest without a gap and without a spike that anyone has identified as a subsistence crisis. There is no destruction layer at Babylon. There is no famine in the record. The canals went on being dug.

Why? Not because the Persians were merciful, though they were not gratuitous. Because **the metabolic note is called by the disruption of coordination, not by the fall of an apex** — and Cyrus replaced a king while leaving the administration, the temples, the property regime and the personnel exactly where they were.

That is the comparison the whole pair was built to make, and it comes out cleanly. Two conquests of the same country ninety years apart. In 612 the conquerors destroyed the state and dismantled its capitals, and the note came due across the

northern plain within a generation. In 539 the conquerors kept the state and changed the name in the date formula, and the note was never presented. **The variable is not the violence of the conquest. It is whether the coordinating apparatus survives it.**

The note that was called deliberately

But the note was called during this empire's life, twice, and both times on somebody else.

The first is Assyria's, in 612, which this dynasty called itself and which is entered above in the sword column but belongs equally here: the destruction of the Assyrian state is the proximate cause of the collapse of the agricultural system that had fed northern Mesopotamia.

The second is Judah's, and it is the clearer case because the archaeology has been argued over for thirty years.

Judah before 597 was a small kingdom of perhaps seventy-five thousand people, with Jerusalem holding something on the order of fifteen to twenty-five thousand of them — a population carried on terraced hill agriculture, olive and wine production, storage, a fortified system and an administrative class that organised all of it. Between 597 and 582 Babylon destroyed the fortified towns, burnt the capital, executed the governing class at Riblah, deported the administrative and craft population, and installed no provincial system in its place — a point on which both sides of the archaeological argument agree.

What followed is measured by settlement survey, and the two principal reconstructions disagree about magnitude while agreeing about direction. Oded Lipschits puts the decline in settlement occupation at sixty to seventy per cent, varying by region. Avraham Faust puts it at eighty to ninety per cent, and notes that of eleven excavated rural sites around Jerusalem only two show continuity into the Persian period. Reviewers have suggested the true figure may sit between them, since squatters and people living in tents leave almost nothing to find.

Take the range as sixty to ninety per cent, and hold what it means. The deportations account for somewhere between four and a half and twenty thousand people. The killed at Riblah and in the sieges account for some further thousands. Neither comes close to explaining a decline of that magnitude in a population of seventy-five thousand.

The rest is the note. It is people who were not deported and not killed, dying or dispersing over the following decades because the system that had lifted them above the hillsides' natural carrying capacity — the terraces maintained, the storage administered,

the fortified towns that made the countryside safe, the class that organised the year — had been removed on purpose.

A metabolic debt can be called deliberately, on a third party, by an empire that never pays its own. That is the Neo-Babylonian accounting in a sentence, and it is not a moral about the callousness of Babylonians. It is what happens when a conqueror decides that a small kingdom on his frontier is not worth the cost of a provincial administration, removes its own administration for security reasons, and leaves. Nobody in Babylon intended the depopulation of the Judaean hills. It followed from a decision about garrisons.

The honest counterweight has to be entered too. There is a serious "continuity" school which holds that the Judaean countryside carried on much as before and that the biblical picture of an empty land is an exilic community's self-serving story. Hans Barstad and Joseph Blenkinsopp have argued versions of it. The survey evidence has moved the field against the strong form of that position, but the argument is live, and a reader should know that the module's metabolic reading depends on a body of archaeological interpretation that is contested at exactly the point where it does most work.

The forgetting, and its inverse

The previous study closed its accounting on a measurement of how fast an empire disappears: Xenophon marching past Nineveh two hundred and eleven years later, recording the dimensions of the wall, and being told the city was called Mespila and had once belonged to the Medes.

Babylon supplies the inverse and it is worth setting out because it bears directly on what the last module has to weigh.

Babylon was not forgotten. It was not destroyed in 539 and it was not abandoned afterwards. Its cults and its scholarship continued under Persians, Greeks and Parthians; its astronomical observation programme ran for another five hundred years, to about 61 BC; its mathematics and its division of the circle are still in use. The name never went out of the world's vocabulary for a single century.

But look at *whose* vocabulary. The Babylon that survived in the memory of the West is not the Babylon of the prebend registers and the barley prices and the regular watching of the sky. It is the Babylon of the people this empire deported: the city by whose rivers they sat down and wept, the tyrant whose fall Isaiah celebrates, the whore of the Apocalypse six centuries later. The empire's most durable monument is a lament composed by its captives, and its name entered the languages of Europe as a synonym

for imperial arrogance because the community it moved to the Nippur canals was the one whose framework survived to do the naming.

Module 4 explains why. This empire destroyed the institutional carriers of the Judaean formation — the temple, the king, the land — and left the community intact and concentrated, which forced that formation to convert from ambient to portable. And portable formations travel. The Babylonians' own framework was carried by a city, a calendar, a temple and a procession, none of which could be taken anywhere; when those finally stopped, five centuries later, there was nothing for a family to carry away, and the civilisation that had produced the longest observational record in history left no descendants to tell its own story.

So the rate of forgetting is not a property of destruction. Assyria was destroyed and forgotten in two centuries. Babylon was preserved and remembered for two and a half thousand years — in the words of the people it had carried off, who were the only ones left with a mouth.

Reading the accounting against the framework

First, and the pair's central finding: the metabolic note is called by the disruption of coordination, not by the fall of an apex. The corpus has carried the metabolic debt as a consequence of conquest and collapse generally. The controlled comparison sharpens it. The same country, the same irrigation-dependent agriculture, two conquests ninety years apart, opposite outcomes: in 612 the conquerors destroyed the state and its capitals and the note came due across northern Mesopotamia within a generation; in 539 the conquerors kept the administration and changed the name in the date formula, and the note was never presented at all — no famine, no settlement collapse, no gap in the price series, no interruption in the archives.

The debt is owed to the coordinating apparatus, not to the ruler. A conquest that replaces the apex and preserves the machinery costs the population nothing metabolically, however violent the battle that produced it. A conquest that dismantles the machinery costs a population that had no part in the war. The corpus should ask, of every collapse it examines, not how many died in the fighting but **whether the people who organised the water, the storage and the year were still doing so the following spring.**

Second: the note can be called deliberately, on a third party, by an order that never pays its own. Judah is the case. Between four and a half and twenty thousand people were deported and some thousands killed, out of a population of perhaps seventy-five thousand — and the settlement record shows a decline of sixty to ninety per cent. The gap between those figures is the metabolic debt, paid by people who were

neither deported nor killed, over decades, because the fortified towns and the administrative class and the maintained terraces were gone and no provincial system was installed to replace them.

A conqueror who removes a subject kingdom's administration for security reasons and declines to install his own has called that kingdom's metabolic note, whether or not it occurs to him. This is a distinct instrument and the corpus should carry it as one: not massacre, not deportation, but the deliberate removal of the coordinating layer, whose casualties are large, delayed, invisible to the perpetrator, and absent from every record he keeps.

Third, on the shape of the ledger, which is the exact inverse of the predecessor's. Assyria counted its victims in its own inscriptions and never counted its own dead. Babylon counted nothing and wrote about bricks — so every figure in this module comes from the victims, from excavation, or from a chronicle written for the file.

That inversion has a consequence worth stating for method. **A silent perpetrator is not a gentler one; he is an unaudited one.** The previous study observed that Assyria's habit of recording enemy dead precisely while never recording its own costs was an information failure that eventually damaged the order itself. Babylon's habit was worse in that specific respect: it recorded neither. A state that never writes down what a campaign killed, on either side, has no instrument at all for knowing when campaigning has stopped paying — which is one plausible reading of why the same army was marched into the Levant every year for four decades after there was nothing left there to conquer.

Fourth: the rate of forgetting depends on whose formation survives, not on whether the city was destroyed. Assyria was razed and forgotten within two centuries. Babylon was preserved intact, its scholarship ran for five hundred more years, and it is remembered universally — in the language of the community it deported, whose formation had been forced into portable form by the very act of deportation, and which therefore outlived every institution in this study. **An empire's memory is curated by whoever is still able to speak about it**, and that is determined by the formation question in Module 4 rather than by anything in the accounting here.

And the ordinary conclusion, which the collection should not let its own analysis obscure. Eighty-seven years after Nabopolassar was crowned, the arrangement he founded had killed an unknown but substantial number of people at Nineveh, an unknown number at Ashkelon and Jerusalem and Opis, seventy-five men on one afternoon at Riblah, and — by the removal of a governing class from a small kingdom in the hills — a further population of perhaps thirty to sixty thousand who never saw a

Babylonian soldier. Nobody in Babylonia in 539 was thinking about any of it. The bakers turned up on their days, the barley price was recorded, and no date was missed. That is what it looks like when enough time has passed for people to forget that violence made the arrangement, and it is the ordinary condition of every order in this collection, including the one the reader is living in.

A note on sources. The deportation list is **quoted exactly** from the Authorised Version, Jeremiah 52:28–30, and the Riblah execution from Jeremiah 52:27; both are in the public domain. The differing figures in the book of Kings (2 Kings 24:14 and 24:16) are cited from the same version and are summarised rather than quoted. The chronicle material on Assur, Nineveh and the phrase about a mound and a ruin is quoted from C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh* (1923), public domain, as in earlier modules; the chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar's early years, including Ashkelon, the Arab raid, the rebellion of the tenth year and the fall of Jerusalem, and the Nabonidus Chronicle for Opis, are **paraphrased** for the copyright reason stated throughout this study. The Ezekiel passage on Tyre was quoted in full in Module 1 and is summarised here.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: Oded Lipschits for the sixty to seventy per cent settlement decline and for the general reconstruction of Judah under Babylonian rule; Avraham Faust for the eighty to ninety per cent figure, for the rural-site continuity data, and for the argument against the continuity school; Hans Barstad and Joseph Blenkinsopp as the principal representatives of that school, whose position is noted rather than dismissed; Bustenay Oded for the Assyrian deportation totals used for comparison; Lawrence Stager and the Leon Levy expedition for the Ashkelon destruction; Michael Jursa for the continuity of the Babylonian archives across 539; Abraham Sachs and Hermann Hunger for the astronomical diaries and their price series. The Assyrian metabolic collapse is taken from this collection's preceding study and the survey literature cited there.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The Judaean settlement figures are the module's load-bearing quantitative claim and they are contested by a factor of nearly two between the two leading reconstructions, with a live minority position holding that the decline has been overstated altogether; the module has given the range and named the dispute rather than picking a number. The inference that the gap between the deportation figures and the settlement decline represents a metabolic debt is an inference — it is the most economical explanation, but the survey record cannot distinguish death from emigration, and some unknown proportion of the missing population went to Egypt, to Ammon, or into the Judaean countryside's archaeological invisibility rather than into a grave. The population figure of seventy-five

thousand for pre-conquest Judah is a survey estimate with wide error bars. No casualty figure whatever is available for Nineveh, Ashkelon, Tyre, Opis or the Judaean sieges, and none has been invented here. The deportation totals from Judah are given as a range spanning a factor of four because the two biblical accounts cannot be reconciled. And the claim that Babylonia's own note was never called rests on the absence of famine or price disruption in a record that is excellent for the cities and poor for the countryside; a rural subsistence crisis in the 530s would very likely not appear in the archives this module has consulted.

MODULE 12

The Regular Watching

Module 12 · Convergence & Divergence — what the organising question returned, what the controlled comparison with Assyria yields, the trade this empire refused to make and another ruler in this collection made without noticing; and the strongest case that nothing here failed at all

Six hundred years of nights

The Babylonians had a name for it. They called the texts *naṣāru ša ginê* — the regular watching, or the watching of the regular thing.

Every night, in Babylon, somebody observed the sky and wrote down what he saw. The short records were compiled into longer tablets covering half a year each, in a smaller and more careful hand. Each month's entry ran in a fixed order: the moon and the planets, eclipses, solstices and equinoxes; then the weather; then the level of the Euphrates; then the market prices of barley, dates, cuscuta, cress, sesame and wool; then the events of the month.

The earliest surviving tablet is from 652 BC. The latest is from 61 BC. Over a thousand fragments are known. The observations are good enough that the synodic month, derived from them, comes out right to a few parts in ten million.

Count what that programme outlived. It began under Assyrian rule, twenty-six years before Nabopolassar was crowned. It ran through the destruction of Nineveh, the forty-three years of Nebuchadnezzar, four kings in six years, a decade in which the king was in Arabia and the New Year festival was not held, a Persian army standing at the gates of the Esagila, two revolts against Xerxes and the breaking of the families who had endowed it, Alexander, the Seleucids, the Parthians. It was still being kept when Rome was fighting Mithridates.

The men who wrote it were families of astronomer-scholars working under the sponsorship of the assembly of the Esagila — the same body, in the same building, that administered the ceremony by which a man became king of Babylon.

That is the achievement, and it is also the diagnosis, and the fact that the same sentence carries both is what this study has been about.

The question this study was set

The predecessor volume closed on a proposition: that a durable warrant must not be issuable by the wearer at will, and that the corpus knew two solutions to the founder's dilemma — kill the man and keep the institution, or capture the institution and staff it — to which Assyria had added a third, making the anchor a *place*. A hill with a temple on it has no spokesman who can be bribed. And the price of that solution is that the most external anchor available is also the most destructible: when Assur was destroyed in 614 the coronation could not be performed, and the last Assyrian ruler appears never to have been called king by his own scribes.

Babylon drew the other solution. Its anchor was Marduk, held by the Esagila and its priesthood, renewed annually at a rite in which the king took the god's hand and could not do it alone. The prediction to test: **an anchor held by an institution with a spokesman does not get destroyed; it gets turned.**

The result is confirmation, with two corrections that matter more than the confirmation.

The first correction is factual and it has to be stated before anything else, because it cuts against the tidiest version of the thesis. The New Year festival was *held* in 539. Nabonidus had come back from Arabia; the chronicle records that Bēl came out and the *akītu* was performed as in normal times, in the seventeenth year, in the spring of the year the empire ended. Whatever brought down this order, it was not a withheld ceremony in the final season.

So the story cannot be that the priesthood refused to crown him and he fell. The decade of non-performance during the Arabian years did something subtler and worse: it demonstrated, in the temple's own records, four years running, that the institution ran perfectly well without a king in it. The offerings were presented as in normal times. When the shield-bearers arrived in Tashritu, no liturgical date was missed. The establishment had already learned, from its own books, that the kingship was the one part of the machine that could be absent without consequence.

The second correction is about the mechanism, and it is the study's answer to the question as posed. The corpus imagined an institutional anchor being *captured* — infiltrated, bribed, staffed with the ruler's men, its spokesman bought. Nothing of the kind happened. There is no evidence of Persian agents in the Esagila, no purge, no installation of a client priesthood before the event.

What happened is that the certification transferred by **non-obstruction**. The body that could confer the warrant did nothing at all: did not resist, did not obstruct, did not certify the incumbent against the newcomer, and then accepted the newcomer in a document written in its own idiom. That is the cheapest political act available to any

institution at any moment. It requires no conspiracy, no coordination, no risk and no meeting, and it leaves no evidence — which is precisely why studies of collapse routinely miss it, and why this one has had to argue for it from the pattern rather than from a document.

Add to this the finding from Module 3, which is the deeper form of the same thing. The Babylonian robe was a **job description**. The king published, in the first line of his own inscriptions, that what he was, was the provider of Esagila and Ezida — the tireless official, the caretaker, meek and humble. An Assyrian titulary is a claim about a particular life and cannot be worn by anybody else. A custodial claim is a specification, and a specification can be met by a competitor and certified by whoever holds the standard.

So the refined statement, which supersedes the prediction rather than merely confirming it: **an anchor held by an institution does not have to be captured. Where the warrant is defined as service rather than as person, it only has to be re-awarded** — and re-awarding costs the awarding body nothing.

The second test

The SEED proposed a second hypothesis and instructed that the unglamorous alternative be tested first. Babylon deported the same kinds of people as Assyria and settled them together, and what came out was a scripture; the flattering reading is that Babylon was more humane; the unglamorous one is that southern Mesopotamian agriculture is irrigated, that canal work requires labour assembled in blocks, and that the survival of Judaean identity is an artefact of hydrology that nobody intended.

The unglamorous reading held. The mirror towns — Āl-Yahūdu, Ashkelon, Hamath, and the rest — are reconstructed in the mainstream literature as a technique for developing agricultural land, exploiting the fact that a gang from one origin, sharing a language and an internal structure of authority, works new canal ground better than a gang of strangers. Add the administrative convenience of a named, co-located unit for assessment and conscription, and the whole policy is explained without anyone in Babylon having any thought about Judaean identity in either direction.

And the comparison with Assyria had to be restated more carefully than it usually is, because Assyria had no identity policy either. The same conqueror in the same year broke the bulk of the Samarian population into parcels among strangers and kept fifty chariot crews together as a named formation under their own officers, and twelve years later the parcels were untraceable and the formation was still on the books. Both decisions were about what the state wanted the people *for*.

Neither empire had a formation policy. Both had a labour policy. Identity was the residue. Rain-fed northern agriculture does not require concentration; irrigated southern agriculture does. The most consequential cultural outcome of the ancient Near East is downstream of a difference in rainfall.

Three hundred years and eighty-seven

Two empires, one country, ninety years apart, the same roads, the same provincial vocabulary, the same relay posts, the same deportation apparatus, and lifespans of roughly three centuries and eighty-seven years. The landscape raised that ratio and this module owes an answer.

The answer is a single structural difference from which most of the others follow. **Assyria created its elite. Babylon inherited one.**

Assyria's magnates held provinces, offices and estates that the Assyrian state had granted, on terms it set, revocable at its word. Every man of consequence in that order held what the order had given him, and would lose it if the order fell. The default therefore bound with enormous force, and it bound so tightly that accessions became total revaluations and the successions were murderous — the finding this study came to test.

Babylon's family-name class held prebends: heritable, divisible into half-days, saleable for silver, registered in a temple's wax ledger, and derived from a god who had been in that building for a thousand years before Nabopolassar. The dynasty enriched them enormously with the plunder of Assyria and the tribute of the Levant. It never re-sourced a single title.

Run the consequences and they cover nearly the whole difference between the two empires.

The army. Assyria kept a standing corps on a payroll, recruited by officers reporting past the governors to the palace. Babylon sent orders to the temples, which raised the men from their own dependants and bought their shoes and arrows out of their own endowments — so the crown's floor of force was requisitioned from a body it did not own.

The revenue. Assyria taxed provinces through its own officials. Babylon's fiscal machinery was the temples, and when the external windfall was exhausted around 570 the crown began drawing them down: requisitions that made the Eanna sell gold and fail to pay its prebendaries in 591, internal fees converted into crown taxes, a collection office housed inside the Esagila, collection farmed out, outsiders promoted over incumbents.

The warrant. Assyria's anchor was a place and could be destroyed. Babylon's was the same institution that armed the soldiers and collected the money.

The reach. Assyria grew its radius over three centuries by solving one obstacle after another. Babylon took the finished instrument in a single afternoon at Carchemish and never extended it, because reach is not roads — it is a bundle of capabilities assembled against the obstacles the builder happened to face, and Assyria had never built anything that addressed water or the Sinai.

The scar tissue. Assyria answered every succession disaster by building something: subdivided provinces, a correspondence channel the magnates could not intercept, a succession treaty sworn by an empire, a dowager's oath. Babylon suffered four violent successions in six years and built nothing, because the men injured were officers who were dead or dismissed before the lesson was usable, and the one institution with the continuity to legislate had no stake in the outcome.

Every one of those runs back to the same root. An order whose elite holds what the order gave will be defended by that elite and convulsed at every handover. An order whose elite holds what a god gave will be calm at every handover and defended by nobody.

And there is a plainer point underneath, which the study should not dress up. Eighty-seven years is roughly the working life of a machine that was taken over rather than built, run at its inherited radius, and consumed rather than renewed. Babylon inherited an empire, a property regime, an elite, a warrant, a literature and an observation programme. It transmitted all of them, competently, for three generations. It originated remarkably little.

The trade that was never made

There is a case elsewhere in this collection that puts the Babylonian settlement into its sharpest relief, and it comes from two thousand years later and a different continent.

Henry VIII faced the same structural problem in a different idiom: a wealthy religious establishment, holding a very large share of the country's land, occupying the interpretive position, and standing between the crown and both the money and the legitimacy it wanted. He dissolved it and sold the land.

The study of that case found that the fiscal and political returns were in direct competition and mutually exclusive. Land kept by the crown enriches the crown and makes nobody a partisan; land sold to the gentry impoverishes the crown and manufactures a constituency. Henry sold because he needed money immediately, and the structural consequence — several thousand families whose title to their estates was good only if the statutes were good, and who therefore acquired a commercial interest

in the permanence of the Reformation — made the settlement irreversible for four centuries. That study closed by asking whether any ruler in this collection had ever made the trade deliberately, and left the question open for the cases that followed.

Babylon is an answer, and it is a third option that is worse than either.

The Neo-Babylonian kings never seized the stock at all. In the first phase they *endowed* it, pouring the plunder of two empires into the temples and enriching every prebendary in the country without granting anybody anything. In the second phase they drew the same institutions down — but by requisition, by tax conversion, by rent-farming, by residency and appointment: extracting the income while leaving the ownership entirely untouched.

Take the income and leave the ownership, and you get neither the money nor the men. The money arrives in a grudging trickle, resisted at every step, because the holder retains the asset and the standing to argue. And no constituency is created at all, because no title has changed hands, so nobody's deed depends on the arrangement continuing.

Henry's gentry defended a settlement they had not designed, for four hundred years, because their land depended on it. Babylon's prebendaries watched a foreign army walk into the capital, and did not miss a liturgical date.

Whether either ruler weighed it is doubtful in both cases. But the three-way choice is now visible, and the corpus can carry it: **a ruler facing a rich institution that holds the interpretive position may destroy it and distribute it, and buy irreversibility at the cost of solvency; or keep it and hold the money and buy nothing; or take its revenues and leave its property, which is the option that appears cheapest, produces the least of both, and turns the certifier into a creditor with a grievance.**

What converges

Set against the rest of the collection, four things in this case are ordinary and should be recorded as such, because a framework that only reports its surprises is not being tested.

The **floor of force** operated exactly as everywhere else. One field battle at Opis settled the fate of an empire; the strongest walls in the world were irrelevant once the army behind them was gone; and there was no popular rising anywhere in eighty-seven years, in either direction, at any point.

Change came from the hierarchy side, as the collection's account of change insists it must. In 539 a rival hierarchy conquered. In 484, when the structural rupture actually came, it came from claimants with royal names, was crushed, and was followed

by an apex repricing the arrangement and breaking the families. The common man appears at Opis as the dead and nowhere as the author of anything.

Liberties were residue from a factional fight — though the fight was an unusual one, since the conceding party was a foreign occupier buying an urban constituency against a tribal countryside, and the beneficiaries were a conquered population.

And **formation ran through the community rather than the curriculum**, confirming from the positive direction what the Assyrian case had established from the negative.

What diverges

Four things in this case are not ordinary, and each is now a proposition the collection can carry elsewhere.

One: enrichment is not alignment. A dynasty made a coordinating class enormously richer for eighty-seven years and was not defended by it for an hour, because it never re-sourced a single title. The two are routinely confused because they usually travel together. Here they came apart, and the case shows what the difference is worth.

Two: a class with convertible capital does not calm a succession; it evacuates one. The prediction inherited from the Assyria study was that portable elite wealth should produce smoother handovers. Babylonia had the most portable elite wealth in the ancient world and the most violent successions in this collection's ancient half. The prediction failed because it assumed one elite where there were two, and the one that could physically decide an accession held offices that could not be sold, inherited or carried away. Security buys a class safety and costs it leverage.

Three: where the ruler's demands fall on the body that certifies him, a fiscal squeeze is a legitimacy crisis with a lag — and the certifier's weapon, having no soldiers, is documentation. The priests of Sippar met the squeeze by manufacturing a seventeen-hundred-year-old stone charter exempting their estates from royal labour service, in archaising script, ending with the assurance that it was not a lie but the truth. Antiquity is the one claim a ruler can neither audit nor outrank.

Four: a conquest that preserves the coordinating apparatus calls no metabolic note. The same country, the same irrigation dependence, two conquests ninety years apart: in 612 the state was destroyed and the note came due across the northern plain within a generation; in 539 the administration stayed at its desks and there was no famine, no settlement collapse and no gap in the price series. The debt is owed to the machinery, not to the man on the throne.

The strongest case that nothing here failed

This study is required to end on the best argument against itself, stated fully. Here it is, and it is strong.

The entire framing of a short-lived or failed empire is a historian's artefact. Eighty-seven years is an unremarkable imperial span; a great many orders in this collection and outside it ran shorter, and the comparison with Assyria's three centuries is a comparison with an outlier. The Neo-Babylonian empire was defeated once, in one battle, by the largest military power the world had yet produced, and lost. That is not a structural indictment; it is what happens to most states that meet a stronger one.

And it was not destroyed. Its capital was not sacked, its population was not massacred, its temples went on operating, its courts went on sitting, its scribes went on writing, its families went on trading. The civilisation continued under Persians, Greeks and Parthians for half a millennium after the last native king. The observational programme ran to 61 BC. Babylonian mathematics — sexagesimal counting, the sixty minutes and the three hundred and sixty degrees, the base on which the zodiac was shortly afterwards laid out — is in use in every timepiece and every navigational instrument now on earth.

And the economy was working. Module 5's numbers are not the numbers of an order in decay: across the dynasty, prices fell and wages rose, free hired labour expanded at the expense of compulsory service, monetisation deepened, an urban working class came into existence, and the transaction of last resort — a free person selling himself or his child to eat — disappears from an archive of tens of thousands of tablets that records every other kind of misery in abundance.

And its most consequential product outlived every order in this collection. The scriptural canon assembled by the community it deported and settled together on the Nippur canals is, by any measure of duration and reach, the most durable thing produced anywhere in the ancient Near East. Judged by what came out of it rather than by how long its dynasty lasted, this was the most consequential eighty-seven years in the region's history.

That case should be conceded almost entirely, and this study concedes it. The empire was not a failure, its people were not badly governed by the standards of the sixth century BC, and a reader who takes away the impression of a doomed or decadent order has misread the evidence and this module.

Three things the case cannot have.

The scripture is not its achievement. It was made by people this empire had broken, out of materials this empire had destroyed — a burnt temple, a blinded king, a lost land — in a form Babylonian civilisation never developed and could not have used,

because a formation carried by a city, a calendar and a procession has no reason to become portable and never did. To credit the empire with the outcome is to credit the disaster with the recovery. But the opposite reading is equally wrong, and this study has resisted it too: it was not an accident. It was the structural consequence of a policy — settle the deportees in blocks on new canal land, because irrigation wants assembled hands — which happened to leave a community intact while removing every institutional carrier of its framework, and thereby forced that framework into a portable form. Nobody in Babylon intended it. Legibility is not pardon, and it is also not credit.

Brevity is not the interesting fact; frictionlessness is. The remarkable thing about 539 is not that the empire ended after eighty-seven years but that it ended without anybody defending it. No temple resisted. No great family declared for the king. No city held out. Three of the greatest sanctuaries in the country did not send their gods to the capital when he asked. The shield-bearers stood at the Esagila's gates and the liturgy did not miss a date. That is not a fact about Persian strength; it is a fact about an arrangement that had enriched everyone and tied nobody, and it is what this study was for.

And the cost column stands. Nineveh made a mound and a ruin. Ashkelon reduced to heaps. Seventy-five men executed in an afternoon at Riblah on a list, with a king's sons killed in front of him before he was blinded. Thirteen years of an army on a beach for nothing. And the Judaean hills, where between four and a half and twenty thousand people were deported and some thousands killed, and the settlement record shows a decline of sixty to ninety per cent — the difference being people who were neither deported nor killed, who died or dispersed over the following decades because the administration that had kept them alive above the hillsides' natural carrying capacity had been removed on purpose and nothing put in its place. That was not a battle casualty and no Babylonian ever counted it.

Both columns are true. An order can be competently run, economically improving, culturally magnificent and lethal to the people at the edge of it, and the recognition that these are not in tension is most of what this collection is for.

The men who did not stop

On the sixteenth of Tashritu, 539 BC, a foreign army entered Babylon without a battle. On the third of Arahsamnu its king entered the city and proclaimed peace.

Somewhere in Babylon that month, a man went up in the evening and wrote down where the moon was, and what the weather had been, and the height of the river, and what a *kurru* of barley was fetching in the market, and what had happened.

He had been taught the format by his father. His son would keep it after him, under a Persian, and his son's son under a Macedonian, and the family after them under kings whose names nobody in that room could have pronounced. The last of them put down his stylus a little under five hundred years later.

That is the answer to what this order was and what it left. Its kings were replaceable, and were replaced, and the arrangement they built lasted less than a century because it had made no one's fortune depend on it. The institution underneath them, which they had enriched and then drained and never owned, went on doing its job for six hundred years — through every one of them, and through everyone who came after — because it had never needed a king to do it.

The regular watching. The watching of the regular thing.

Reading the whole against the framework

The propositions this study returns to the collection, gathered and stated once:

On the anchor. An institutional anchor is not captured; it is re-awarded. Where the warrant is published as a job description — provider, custodian, keeper of the offerings — the incumbent has named his own succession criterion and handed it to whoever certifies performance. And the transfer happens by non-obstruction, which is the cheapest political act in existence, requires nothing of the certifier, and leaves no document.

On settlements. A fourth family beside vacancy, recognition and divisibility: *endowment* — enriching an incumbent class through the institution it already draws from, granting nothing and altering no title. It is the move available to a ruler who came from inside the order and cannot dispossess. It buys goodwill, and goodwill is transferable to the next endower.

On elite capital. The unit of analysis for succession violence is not the elite but the faction that can physically decide an accession. Convertible capital does not calm a succession; it removes the moderating mass.

On extraction. Where the ruler taxes the body that certifies him, date the crossover from endowment to levy; it is the beginning of the fracture, and it precedes the visible crisis by decades. And an empire that stops expanding begins converting its own institutions into revenue — visible in the tax vocabulary long before anything is visible in the field.

On information. Genre tracks the metric: read a royal record's subject matter as what its author was scored on, not as what he did. Substrate selects the survivors, and substrate tracks institution — identify each body's writing medium before drawing

conclusions from an archive's shape. And where the interpretive class is also the fiscal instrument, the deception runs upward, and its instrument is manufactured antiquity.

On liberty. Protections can be bought by an outside power to split a conquered country, and they outlive the purchaser without a domestic constituency to defend them. Keep protection from private power and protection from the state permanently separate. And an unenforceable right migrates into poetry, ritual and forgery — read the sanction clause to find out what its holders can actually do.

On change. Separate a change of apex from a change of arrangement and date them independently; a conquest that leaves the settlement and the personnel in place is a change of management, and the structural rupture may come decades later. A wall is not a floor.

On the accounting. The metabolic note is called by the disruption of coordination, not by the fall of a ruler — and it can be called deliberately, on a third party, by an order that never pays its own.

And on formation, which is the finding this pair of studies exists to have made. Neither empire had a formation policy; both had a labour policy, and identity was the residue. A formation carried by standing institutions is cheap and cannot travel; one carried by a text, a fixed day and a household is expensive and can. The conversion from the first to the second is forced by the destruction of the carriers, and is possible only where the community survives the destruction. Where both conditions hold, an attack on a people's institutions does not end their framework. It obliges them to build a better one.

A note on sources. The ancient title of the astronomical diaries, the span 652 to 61 BC, the fixed order of their monthly contents, and their compilation by scholarly families under the sponsorship of the Esagila assembly are paraphrased from the edition and study of the diaries by Abraham Sachs and Hermann Hunger and the subsequent literature. The chronicle notice that the New Year festival was performed in Nabonidus's seventeenth year is **paraphrased**, as throughout this study, for the copyright reason stated in Module 1.

All other primary material in this module has been quoted or paraphrased in the modules where it was first introduced, and the source notes there stand: Langdon 1905 and Thureau-Dangin 1921 for the royal inscriptions and the New Year ritual, both public domain; Gadd 1923 and Luckenbill 1926–27 for the Assyrian and chronicle material, both public domain; Harper 1901 for Sargon's cylinder; Dougherty 1929 and Sayce 1891 for the tithe receipts; the Authorised Version throughout for the Hebrew sources; and paraphrase without quotation for the Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus

chronicles, the *King of Justice* text, *Advice to a Prince*, the Cruciform Monument, and the whole economic and prosopographic literature.

The comparison with the dissolution of the English monasteries draws on this collection's own study of that case, whose finding that the fiscal and political returns of a seized stock are mutually exclusive is quoted in substance and credited there; the question it left open — whether any ruler ever made the trade deliberately — is what this module has answered, and the answer is that Babylon made a third choice that neither study had isolated.

Weakest evidence, on the face of the module. The central claim about non-obstruction is a structural inference from a pattern assembled across five modules and is, by its nature, a claim about an act that leaves no trace; a reader who requires positive evidence will not find it here and should weigh the argument accordingly. The reading of 539 as frictionless depends on arguments from absence — no resistance recorded, no family declaring, no city holding out — in archives that are overwhelmingly commercial and might not have recorded political alignment in any case; this was flagged in Module 8 as that module's most serious methodological weakness and it is inherited here unresolved. The three cities whose gods did not enter Babylon remain the study's most speculative single datum. The Judaean settlement figures on which the metabolic finding rests are contested by a factor of nearly two, with a live minority position rejecting the decline altogether. The claim that the empire originated little and transmitted much is a judgement, not a measurement, and a specialist could reasonably contest it by pointing to the agrarian expansion, the monetisation of the labour market and the scale of the building programme, all of which were genuinely new. And the identification of Nabopolassar's origins, on which several of this study's structural readings partly depend, remains an argument rather than a fact.